Fate's Betrayal

You are not strong enough to save lives. You are not strong enough to sacrifice one to save many.
-Darth Vectivus

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"Jedi *Knight*, Master," Nelani laughed. "I'm a Jedi Knight now."
"Yes, I'm glad to realize that you've passed your trials and are fully vested as a Jedi Knight. Congratulations."
Eighteen year old Jedi Knight, Nelani Dinn grinned with obvious delight. "Wouldn't have all been possible without you."
"Again, I'm sorry I wasn't there at the confirmation ceremony." Jacen Solo said with a wince.
"Hey, stop apologizing. Matters of galactic peril are much more important than seeing me in new robes," Nelani nudged him playfully. "Besides, isn't that why you invited me along on this mission of yours, to make it up to me?"
"Well, that and the company," Jacen answered back with a roguish grin. "The destination is pretty out of the way and the journey was guaranteed to be a long, boring one."
"Hey, for my first official mission as a Jedi Knight, boring sounds good to me," Nelani bantered. "By the way, I've heard that you've already replaced loveable little me."
Jacen chuckled, the hyperspace tunnel continuing to stream by outside the cockpit of their light freighter. "Nothing official yet. You know, with the Bug-War over, you getting the promotion, and things finally stabilizing, new priorities are popping up. My cousin Ben, he's been chomping at the bit to get more involved in Order business, so I offered to give him a few pointers."
"That's sweet," Nelani beamed. "I'm sure he'll learn loads from you, Master. I mean, I came out okay enough, right?"
"I guess," Jacen replied teasingly.
"So what daring adventure are we heading off to this time?"
"Well, like the journey, I hope there's no daring or adventure where we're going."
"No planet in mortal peril? System on the verge of anarchy? Doomsday weapon needing an expiration date?"
"Nope," Jacen chuckled again. He then sobered. "Back during the Swarm War, I felt my old master die."
"And I assume it wasn't a nice and peaceful dead?"
"Name a Jedi these past few centuries who's actually had a nice and peaceful death," Jacen said sarcastically.

Nelani thought for a very long moment. "Does Master Yoda's death count?"
"Alone, friendless, on a planet full of malevolence thinking that his one student was about to rush to his doom fighting a Sith who was secretly his dad?"
"Errrm…okay, I give up," Nelani sighed. "You know, master, when you put it that way, we Jedi have very depressing futures to look forward to. We're either going to die being very heroic-like or get stabbed in the back."
"At least we have an option," Jacen tried.
"Anyways, the mission?"
"Just going to check out the place she was killed at," Jacen shrugged. "I looked at the reports from several survey probes and it's apparently in some sort of asteroid field."
"Odd place to meet a not-so-peaceful death," Nelani frowned. "Are you sure it isn't a trap?"
"It's been two years," Jacen shrugged. "I doubt anyone's going to be so patient as to wait that long on the off-chance of meeting me. And before you ask, my apprentice, I've put off going there for two years because of said galaxy-imperiling events."
"What do you expect to find, then?"
"I don't know," Jacen answered back. "Answers. Why my master was out in the asteroid field in the first place? You know me and my questions. Sorry it's not the glorious Jedi-heroic-type mission you might have wanted for your first time out as Jedi Knight."
"Would you *stop* apologizing, Master," Nelani laughed, eyes bright with glee. "I'm fine. We could be watching moisture evaporators catch water and I'd still have fun so long as you were there too. I don't want to be a big, famous Jedi. I just want to be me, Nelani Dinn, orphan from Lorrd who was lucky enough to bump into you and live out her dream of becoming a protector of all things great and small."
"Well, Jedi *Knight* Dinn, you're definitely succeeding in that goal so far," Jacen grinned. "Who knows, maybe one day you'll have an apprentice of your own and teach them all about your cheery outlook on things."
"You're cheery too, Master. Just in the stoic, emotionless, gloom-and-doom type of way."
"That makes no sense what so ever."
"Hey, from my point of view it makes perfect sense," Nelani said, pretending to be hurt. "It's true. Beneath all your perfect Jedi stoicism there's this cheery joking part of you that you sometimes let out to play. Why do you think the Queen Mother loves you so much?"

"I thought it was for my stoic demeanor. If we stand side-by-side, we can imitate a wall of ice perfectly."
Nelani laughed. "No, if you stand side-by-side, you'll be spending most the time making eyes at each other when you think no one is looking and generating enough heat to rival a sun. Do I have to drag out that holovid of the Hapan end-of-the-bug-war celebrations again? You'd have thought a bonfire would erupt in those gazes you were shooting at each other."
"I've learned long ago that you always have evidence to back up your arguments," Jacen shook his head with a wry smirk.
"Well of course, the only way to counter your logic is with more sensible logic," Nelani said, airily dusting off her sleeve.
The two laughed again, enjoying the camaraderie between the both of them. Since the war's end, they had more or less gone their separate ways. Jacen had re-immersed himself in the Galactic Senate, trying to return the Order to its roots and distance itself from the greater government. It was a full-time job considering that Kenth had aspirations for the Order that didn't necessarily fit the resources the Order could field. The war had put a severe dent in the population of the growing Jedi Order, and the missing Force-sensitives across the galaxy prevented the Order from rebuilding as fast as they wanted. Between taming the political ambitions of the head of the galactic government and helping his uncle keep the Jedi Order true to itself, Jacen was busier than ever. In the course of that time-frame, Nelani decided that she wanted to become a Jedi Knight to better help the Order. Jacen set her up with several different masters for lessons and points of view he wasn't able to offer, and did everything in his power to ensure that she was ready when her trials came around. Hectic was another word that came to mind. You'd think that a war ending would mean things would slow down. But in fact, things became even more convoluted as power transfers and political games were now free to take place without the added fear of galactic annihilation. Between it all, he still needed to find time to drop in on Tenel Ka and their daughter, if only for a few hours, on his way from one destination to another.
He was lucky enough to get any time off at all.
"Hey Anakin," Jacen twisted his head to look over his shoulder. Seated in the passenger seats of the freighter was the Director of the Galactic Alliance Guard and his half Balosarian Apprentice Hedda No-Last-Name.
To most of the general public, it was widely believed that the two Solos detested each other and would never work with the other in a million

years. The animosity the public saw was aided by the various press conferences the Solos had held lambasting the policy and political maneuvers of the other. They would often back opposing bills in the Senate, support various causes that were at odds with each other, and even denounce the other with scathing descriptors and examples of the other's recklessness. Older stories of Anakin and Jacen being on opposite ends of events such as Centerpoint and the Yuuzhan Vong War were recycled to be compared to current events. The narrative created by the media outlets, and by the Solos themselves, showed a bitter feud between the two as their vied for the influence needed to shape a galaxy.

But that narrative couldn't be further from the truth. In actuality, both he and Anakin had the same goal in mind, the end of Jedi Order involvement in the galactic government. Despite their differences in opinions on how to achieve that goal, both were politically savvy and had joined forces—covertly of course—on numerous occasions with sweeping results. In the couple of years they had been in office, they had orchestrated an intricate political scheme that saw the reduction of Jedi and support for Jedi in the Galactic Alliance armed forces, the decrease of Jedi support by the Senate, and even got a bill past restricting Jedi Order involvement in purely political GA matters—though Hamner had vetoed it, the symbolic passing had sent shockwaves through the Senate. In a win for both Anakin and Jacen, the Jedi Order was frozen out of any overt military action; any Jedi involvement in military matters was run out of the GAG instead.

Needless to say, Jacen's relationship with his brother was far from the 'murder-at-first-opportunity' tune the media was playing. In fact, both brothers were greatly enjoying the intellectual challenge of being 'mortal enemies' without being caught and incorporating conflicting agendas and extremists to achieve the same goal.

Anakin glanced to his brother. "Hmm?"

"So how was Tatooine? I heard you and Tahiri finally managed to take your family out there."

"Hot, sandy," Anakin deadpanned. "Actually, it was great. Cassa even managed to befriend a Hutt-spawn."

"She's Cassa, she makes friends wherever she goes," Jacen laughed, shaking his heads at the antics of his eight year old niece.

"True," Anakin rolled his eyes. "The trip itself…well…it was a standard Solo vacation, let's put it that way. I don't know how it happened, but we somehow managed to get roped into this peace-conference between the settlers of several major farmsteads and a couple of larger tribes of Sand People. With the Hutts trying to reassert control

over the planet in hopes of rebuilding, they were harassing both groups. The two groups got fed up with it and when Tahiri and I arrived with the kids, they somehow took it as a sign the Force approved what they were doing."
"So what happened?" Nelani asked, wide-eyed.
"Cassa befriended a Hutt," Anakin grinned, shaking his head. "The Hutt happened to be the kid of one of the more influential Hutts on the rebuilt Hutt Council. I actually don't know how, but they managed to get the council to actually back off."
"What about the farmers and the Sand People?" Nelani pressed.
"Do you always ask this many questions?" Anakin said jokingly.
"I take after my master," Nelani retorted, lightly nudging Jacen with her elbow.
"Tahiri and I negotiated an uneasy peace, along with an actual map with boundary lines," Anakin shrugged. "I haven't been back to Tatooine to see if it worked out, but I'm hoping it did."
"Any more millennia-old problems you want to take a crack at?" Jacen said with a rueful grin.
"Nah, I think I hit my quota."
"You only took that trip last month, right?" Nelani said. "How'd you get leave time again to go on this one?"
"Just excused it as possible Sith activity threatening the stability of the government," Anakin waved her concern off. "You'd actually be surprised at what's allowed to 'ensure the safety of the people'."
Jacen looked over his shoulder. "Yeah, about that. Why'd you want to come on this trip again? You never did answer me before."
"The coordinates," Anakin said. He was leaned back in his chair, head pillowed in the palms of his hands. It looked as if he didn't have a care in the world, but Jacen knew better. Anakin was hiding something, like always these days. One didn't become head of a secret-y police organization and not have a few secrets. "If I'm right, the one who killed Vergere also happened to be the one who trained me and Alema back during the Yuuzhan Vong War. And if Vergere knew about this place, and Lumiya had similar training methods, Lumiya was probably her apprentice."
"I take back all that bright positive optimism from earlier," Nelani sighed. "Only you, master, would drag me to an asteroid base with crazy dark Jedi not once, but twice."
"You made it out the last time," Jacen said.
"Uh huh. Listen, if you want to drag me to a third asteroid base full of crazy dark Jedi, remind me to pass. Third time's the charm after all."

"I thought it was the second time?" Hedda voiced. "You know, twice-lucky and all that."
"Thanks," Nelani made a face at the younger Jedi.
"Nothing's going to happen," Jacen laughed at their antics. "Any dark Jedi on the asteroid has to be long gone by now. Or do you think all dark Jedi do is just sit around in dark gloomy places tapping their fingers together and dreaming of being all powerful? It's been *two* years since Vergere died, over a decade since Anakin was there. At most we'll find an empty mining facility full of the echoes of those long past."
"Like that isn't creepy at all," Nelani sighed.
"It's why I brought my little brother along," Jacen said drolly. "He's like a giant creep-sponge. He'll soak it all up and leave the place creep-free just for us."
"Really?" Hedda, who had been looking back and forth at the different speakers, turned towards her master.
"My brother likes to joke around," Anakin rolled his eyes. "The place we're going to is strong in the Force. When I was there, it was more of a reactive environment than a passive one. If you're afraid of it, it'll manifest itself as your fears. If you're angry, it will take the form of that which you hate."
"It sounds like a sentient spirit then," Nelani spoke up. "In the Jedi archives, all nexi of Force energy that were reactive were actually the ghosts or essence of a Force-user. There are stories about Korriban, the Valley of the Jedi, even on Yavin Four."
"If it was a spirit of some departed Sith, Alema and I never saw it," Anakin answered.
"Maybe it was a shy Sith," Hedda said.
"Or a very grumpy one," Jacen chuckled again. "Imagine being trapped on an asteroid in the middle of nowhere and your only visitors are dark Jedi with delusions of grandeur and a pair of hormonal teenagers."
"If he or she wasn't insane before, that'd do it," Nelani laughed.
The computer console began to blink.
"Hyperspace reversion in five minutes," Nelani reported.
"Great," Jacen turned back around, stretching out with his senses. "Maybe now I can finally get some answers.
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The ship dropped out of hyperspace without any fanfare. Greeting them was the desolate asteroid field of the star-system known only as MZX32905. The system's sun was a dim red giant, giving the floating field of ice and rock a sinister background glow.

"Such a friendly place," Nelani muttered, wrapping an arm around herself. "We're not even at the asteroid yet and this place screams of the dark side."
"Not the dark side," Anakin said. "Just dark emotions. Just as a lightsaber can be used for good or ill depending on the feeling of the one wielding it, so can the Force."
"Well, dark whatever," Nelani breathed. "Master, can't you take me anywhere nice?"
"I'll work on it," Jacen said with a ghost of a smile. "Anakin, where to?"
"Been a while since I was here," Anakin said, eyes scanning the asteroid field. "Follow the Force to the source. That way."
"Setting course." Jacen remarked. His own expression becoming guarded as the sinister aura of the abandoned asteroid grew. "At least we know we're in the right system."
Anakin nodded once, curtly without any smile. "I've got a bad feeling about this."
The ship coasted forward in utter silence, the asteroids around them dancing about the ship but never touching it.
"It knows we're coming," Nelani swallowed, her gaze rooted to the viewport and the ever-shifting sea of rocks before them. "The spirit knows."
"It's just your imagination," Jacen said reassuringly, placing a hand on her arm. "Don't worry, Nelani. I won't let anything happen to you."
"Thanks," Nelani tried to smile bravely, the coldness of space outside making her brown eyes look as black as her hair.
"There it is," Anakin pointed, sounding haunted.
"I see it," Jacen eased the ship around several ballistic asteroids towards their goal.
"Master, are you okay?" Hedda asked Anakin.
"Memories," Anakin smiled tightly. "They can only hurt if you let them. This place doesn't give you the choice."
"I take back all the bad things I've ever said about you, Master. I hear the Moon Falls on Endor are nice this time of year, let's see those instead." Nelani said, their destination looming ever closer.
"We'll be okay," Jacen repeated. "Facing our fears is a Jedi thing, something we have to do or those fears will swallow us whole."
"Sensors aren't picking up any life-signs," Hedda said. "No power either, but there's an atmosphere somehow."
Their ship coasted into the abandoned mining facility's shadow, plunging the cockpit into near pitch-blackness. The glow of the control panels illuminated the worried and tightened expressions of the four Force-users onboard.

Nelani, who had chosen that moment to look over her shoulder at Hedda, cried out at the sight of a figure standing in the cockpit doorway. "Rici! What…"
Hedda looked over her shoulder to see what Nelani was gaping at. "Grandma?" Hedda gasped, her own eyes going round as her semi-formed Balosarian stalks swiveled around.
"It's a Force projection," Anakin said, not even looking back, his eyes closed. "Whoever you were thinking of, you'll see it. Ignore it, they can't hurt you."
"That's not very nice," a figured appeared in Anakin's lap, grinning toothily at him. She ran a hand over his jaw-line "Don't you recall all the fun times we've had?"
Anakin emitted a pulse of Force energy, and the specter in his lap flashed out of existence. Jacen, sensing what his brother did, did the same to the visions their apprentices were seeing.
"Okay, the spirit knows we're here," Jacen muttered, trying to stretch out his senses. "And it can block us too."
Both apprentices, still shaken by whatever visions they had seen, didn't respond.
"Starting the docking sequence now," Jacen said carefully. Then, more to himself than anyone else. "Why'd you come here Vergere?"
The ship coasted into the docking bay, which was devoid of any light or any sign of activity.
"If there's no power to this place, what's providing the energy for the mag-con field?" Hedda finally asked.
"It's a creepy dark-side asteroid, and that's your question?" Nelani asked weakly.
With the landing sequence finished, the group piled out of the cockpit and down the landing ramp. The air was stale, smelling of oil and rust. The floodlights from their ship illuminated a small cone of the hangar bay, leaving the rest in eerie darkness.
"Something's been here," Anakin said, his eyes spotting something at the very edge of the cone of light.
"I can't sense anything," Jacen shook his head. "The Force in this place is full of foul intentions."
Anakin activated a glow-stick and held it out in front of them as they advanced. When they reached the edge of the cone of light, Anakin crouched down. "Footprints."
"Lumiya?"
"These are really fresh, look no dust in them at all." Anakin ran a hand over one of the tracks, then tilted his head as he felt something.

Picking an object off the ground, he held it in the blue glow of his light-stick. It was a gear of some sort. "Droids, maybe."
"Droids?" Hedda echoed, baffled.
"Security mechanism of some sort?" Jacen asked. In the darkness of the hangar, it was easy to see the red lights of his jaw prosthetic pulsate as he spoke.
"There wasn't anything like that the last time I was here," Anakin said in negative.
"Be extra careful then," Jacen addressed the two teens with them.
"Roger," Hedda said, loosening the lightsaber from her utility belt.
"Like I wasn't already," Nelani swallowed, glancing around nervously.
"Wait, do you hear something!" Hedda suddenly gasped, her Belosarian stalks swiveling in the direction of one of the tunnels.
"I don't…wait…I hear it too," Nelani agreed. "It sounds like someone is calling for help. Do you hear it too, master?"
Jacen looked to his brother, but both Solos shook their heads. "I don't hear a sound. If there's anyone else on this asteroid, we can't feel them."
"But they're calling for help," Hedda said, taking a hesitant step forward. "We have to investigate, right? It's what Jedi do."
"It's probably a trap," Anakin said evenly. "There was a strong dark side presence on this asteroid when Alema and I were here, capable of making you see, feel, and hear things."
"And if it isn't?" Nelani protested. "If someone down there really does need our help?"
"She has a point," Jacen said reluctantly. "We came here to find out what brought Vergere to this place. So far we've found evidence of droids of some kind, and now voices only our apprentices can hear."
"We really need to find a better self-preservation instinct," Anakin sighed, relenting and gesturing towards his brother. "I'll take point then. Jace, you got the rear?"
"Yeah."
Cautiously the team of four headed through the very narrow metal hallway, the pathway just wide enough for them to squeeze through in a single-file line.
"Narrow isn't it?"
"If the builders had to dig through the asteroid to make it, it probably cost more money to make it wider," Anakin said in response to his apprentice.
"So where does this lead?" Nelani asked.
"To the residential quarters," Anakin replied. "Alema and I were never shown the full asteroid. We did explore once or twice, but the place is

pretty big and we never got further than the five levels immediately surrounding this one. There's some kind of cart system that leads to the center of the asteroid. Didn't get the chance to use it though."
"Anakin, I hear it now," Jacen spoke up, his vision straining to see past the cone of light provided by Anakin's lightsaber. "It's an older woman's voice."
Anakin blinked slowly. "I hear it as well. It's coming from the residential section."
The group managed to make it to the abandoned residential section without encountering anything untoward. When they reached the all-purpose common area, the sounds of the cries for help increased.
"Over there!" Hedda pointed to one of the side rooms.
Cautiously they approached it, their lightsabers fighting back the darkness shrouding their surroundings. The soft blue glow of Nelani's blue blade was the first to highlight the source of the voice. A woman, advanced in age and wearing grimy robes, was chained to a nearby bed-post. Her aged face was creased in pain and distress, her raspy voice repeating the cry for help as if she didn't even realize they were there.
"Let me help her," Hedda began to approach, but Anakin quickly held out an arm to bar her way. "Master?"
"Wait a minute," Anakin said carefully, eyeing the chained woman. With the intense Force energies permeating the asteroid, he couldn't get a reading off her one way or another. He addressed her. "Hello, can you hear or see us?"
"More ghosts? No, no, no, go away," the old woman croaked, her emaciated face tightening in further despair.
"No, we're really here," Nelani spoke up. "We're real. We can help."
"Help? Real?"
Jacen approached her. "I'm Jacen Solo. Who are you?"
"Real?" The woman rasped.
"Real," Jacen confirmed, slowly reaching out and touching the woman's shoulder.
"I'm…Sani," the old woman said weakly. "Countess Sani Tigon of Serenno. Lady Tigon if you must use a title."
Jacen made a gesture, and the binding fell away from her hands. He then offered her a drink from his water-flask. "Lady Tigon? What are you doing out here?"
The old woman finished taking down great greedy gulps of water, and then rubbed at her wrist. "I…I don't know. I was on my way to a conference. The next thing I know I wake up here."
"How long have you been here?" Jacen asked gently.

The captured aristocrat blinked slowly, her cataract-filled irises making the two younger Jedi wonder if she could actually see them. "What day is it today?"
Jacen relayed the date, slowly helping her stand.
"I've been here….a very long time then," Sani breathed out, her expression clouding. "So very long. Years at least. My master, Count Dooku must be worried sick."
"Wait, your master? You are Jedi?" Jacen said.
"Yes," Sani leaned heavily into him, her eyes fluttering close. "Was a Jedi…I've been here for so long."
"I was here a little over a dozen years ago," Anakin said carefully. "I didn't see you here at all."
Comprehension seemed to dawn on the old woman's face. "That is why the droids moved me."
"Droids?"
"Yes," the old woman continued to sag into Jacen, as if her feet couldn't support her frail form. "I was normally kept in this room. But one time, some droids came and moved me deeper into the asteroid. I was kept in a tinier space, nearly starved to death, but I survived somehow. As if the very Force was sustaining me. A short time after that, I was moved back here."
"But why?" Hedda finally gasped. "If you've been here for over forty years….why?"
Sani smiled wryly at the young apprentice. "I wish I knew that answer to that as well, apprentice."
"In any case, you look like you could use some medical care," Jacen spoke. "Let's get her back to civilization. We can explore this place later."
"No, we cannot leave," Sani gripped Jacen's arm in a durasteel grasp. "We can't! There is a great evil on this asteroid. It must be destroyed."
"The source of the darkness we feel?" Jacen said.
"Yes," the old woman nodded vigorously. "It was feeding off my life-force, sustaining itself. I do not want to think about what would happen if it had to search for a new source of food."
"And where would this source be?" Anakin spoke up.
Sani looked to him with white-filled eyes. "The asteroid's core. I know that for sure. All my years here, I could feel my life seeping into the stone all around us."
"Okay. Nelani, Hedda, stay with the countess," Jacen said. "Anakin and I will check…"

"I will come with you," Sani shook her head. "I know this spirit, and though I do not have the strength to defeat him, I will not run from him either."
"She does know him best," Anakin agreed. "And I think it's safer if we stick together. We couldn't sense Lady Tigon on this asteroid with the Force or our ship's sensors. We already know there are droids here, so who knows what or who else could be here."
"Are you sure you're up to it?" Jacen looked to the countess, who was still leaning heavily against him.
"I was brought closer to the core using a rail-car," Sani answered. "We can use that and limit the time I'm on my legs. I may have been a Jedi once, but the Force is not nearly as strong with me as it once was."
The group headed in the direction Sani pointed out, a side path out of the common room that led down a steep set of stairs. Anakin brought up the rear while Hedda and Nelani supported Sani, using the Force to lend what strength they could to the apparently frail woman. Jacen led the way, his lightsaber lighting up the narrow path before them.
At the bottom of the stairwell was an antiquated metal mining cart, sitting on a track that disappeared into the darkness of the asteroid. The lack of dust on the cart, or the tracks, when the surrounding pieces of mining machinery were caked with it, indicated that someone had traveled down the path fairly recently.
"Is there anyone else here?" Nelani asked Sani.
Sani shook her head. "Not that I saw. I was only ever tended to by the droids. They were the ones who brought me food and moved me."
"We'll run into them when we do," Jacen said deactivating his lightsaber and climbing into the cart. "As long as we are here, we might as well do what we set out to do."
The others followed suit, with Anakin pulling out another glowstick to replace the sudden lack of illumination. They strapped themselves in, with Anakin in the back, Jacen in the front, and everyone else seated in the middle. The simplistic control panel was quickly figured out, and Jacen activated the motor that powered cart. It hummed to life, a map of the track appearing on a small monitor. Flicking through the various destinations, Jacen saw a route that led to the center of the asteroid and selected it. With surprisingly silent swiftness, the cart started up and took them into the dark tunnel ahead.
"Why does this feel like an amusement park ride," Hedda voiced, trying to hide her nervousness as the cart sedately made its way down the path.
"I know, right," Nelani laughed weakly. "All we need now is a drooooooop!"

The cart choose that moment to rocket downwards in a sharp dive, the momentum pitching the entire group forward, and then to the side as the cart veered around a corner. The fact that their surroundings were pitch black and that the sharp turn had caused the glow-stick to fly from Anakin's grip, didn't help any. The cart continued at its accelerated speed, whipping around another corner, before slowing as it hit an incline.

"Oh Force, we're going up again," Nelani paled, hands gripping the side of the cart. "Please tell me there's no other side of this hill."

The Force wasn't with her. After a few seconds of climbing, the cart appeared to reach the top. There it sat for a few moments, the group hearing various metallic clicking sounds below. Both Hedda and Nelani chose that moment to blindly reach for their masters, their hearts pounding kilometers a second. When the dreaded moment came, the cart lurched forward, and the two teens let out terrified screams as the cart plunged forward into the darkness. Unlike the previous drop, this drop seemed to go on for a very long time. Finally, in a maneuver that made it feel like their stomachs were about to fly out their throats, it reached the bottom and then followed the rail back up a smaller incline. The click-clack of the wheels on metal soon became the only sound the group could hear as the cart whistled through the dark interior of the asteroid.

Mercifully, the cart slowed once more—the air going from a stuffy warmth to an icy cold and desolate feeling. The cart stopped, and both Hedda and Nelani quickly vaulted over the side and threw up what was left of their lunches. Both Jacen and Anakin, a bit more dignified, likewise dismounted, then blindly grouped for a nearby wall to lean against and refresh themselves with the Force.

"Let's find a different way back to the hangar," Anakin said weakly.

Jacen, shaking on another glow-stick, nodded in agreement. But no sooner had he activated the glow-stick then a bank of lights flickered on over an antiquated door. Inviting, but not so inviting. They could feel the cold oppressive nature of the dark-side ooze through the sealed door. Once in control of their stomachs, they all stared warily at the door.

"You want to take point, Jace?" Anakin said in a weak attempt at humor.

"Let's let Jedi Knight Dinn do it, give her some field experience," Jacen said, causing his former apprentice to squawk in protest.

"Do you know what's behind the door?" Hedda asked Lady Tigon.

The noblewoman shook her head. "I don't remember much, all the days have blurred together. Apologies."

"Don't worry about it," Anakin said reassuringly. "Well, Jace. As Yoda once said, do or do not."
Jacen nodded and activated the door switch. There was a faint grinding of gears, and then a pneumonic hiss as the door slowly slid open on its tracks. A small cloud of dust was accompanied by a waft of stale, cold air. No blasters, ghosts, or beasts greeted the Jedi, and they released a cumulative sigh of relief.
"Okay," Anakin activated his red saber. "Let's go talk to this ghost of a Sith. Maybe we'll get lucky and he'll give up without a fight."
"Really?" Jacen said skeptically.
"My wife's been trying to get me to think positive," Anakin said sheepishly, shaking his head. "I figured it couldn't hurt now."
"Positive, positive is good," Nelani said with a weak nod of agreement as they started down a rickety metal staircase. "Positive like fluffy kittens and puppies."
"And crystal snakes and dart-spiders," Jacen added.
"Those aren't positive, Master," Nelani said wryly. "They kill and like dark spaces."
"They're just misunderstood," Jacen said, keeping his tone light. Even as he spoke, he constantly saw movement out of the corner of his eyes. Whenever he tried to focus on them, however, they disappeared.
"Master," Hedda spoke up.
"I see them too," Anakin answered evenly. "Phantoms, ghosts, just like you saw on the ship."
"Ghosts of what though?" Nelani spoke.
They stepped off the last stair, their lightsabers cutting into the darkness of their surroundings. As they held their blades up to get a better look, they found themselves on a narrow walkway in a vast chamber with multiple corridors leading in different directions. From the abandoned mining equipment that lay strewn about, the path must have been the entrance to the various mine-shafts that cored through the asteroid.
"Great, now what?" Anakin sighed.
"Hey, wait! Where's Lady Tigon!" Hedda suddenly exclaimed.
The group whirled around and realized that the old woman had somehow disappeared. No one had sensed her departure, not that they had been able to sense her in the first place.
The bad feeling everyone was sensing only amplified when they heard a muted explosion and heard the remains of the metal stairwell come crashing down behind them.
"Trap," Jacen and Anakin groaned.

"Master, look!" Nelani gestured wildly, taking a step back as she did. Turning away from the wrecked stairwell, the group saw a mass of individuals standing just outside the cones of light cast by their sabers. They had no definite form other than a shadowy impression of a bipedal being, no face or discernible features.
"More specters?" Anakin said cautiously, stepping in front of Hedda. As the shadows stepped into the light provided by the lightsabers, faces, clothing, details appeared. The younger Jedi recoiled in horror, the older ones were instantly reminded of the gruesome casualties of wars past. There were faces, but they were devoid of skin, there were clothing but fragments of bone poked through. Many of the figures looked as if they were walking incarnations of a being shoved through a meat-grinder.
At once, the group of Jedi could feel a powerful pull in the Force. The mass of shadow-people continued forward slowly but surely, making no sound, facial expressions frozen in visages of sure agony and terror.
"Be gone!" Jacen barked, his Force energy washing over the ranks. Rather than dissipate, however, the entire mob seemed to turn their bloody or eyeless gaze towards him.
Anakin went for an alternate solution, slicing his red blade through the few specters directly in front of him. The blade passed through the air, encountering no resistance. The shadow people remained. One of them reached out and grabbed Anakin's wrist with a mangled hand, and immediately Anakin was bombarded by emotions of raw anger, of fear, of desire, of jealousy.
Clenching his jaw, Anakin managed to block out the attack long enough to slip into Vongphase. The moment he did, the specter released his hand and passed by him. By him, and towards a wide-eyed and terrified Hedda.
"Ideas, Jace!" Anakin yelled out, returning to his regular Force spectrum and once again drawing the attention of the ghosts around him.
"Fight fire with fire," Jacen said grimly, similarly warding off the specters by switching Vongphase on and off.
Their apprentices were surrounded by another horde of the apparitions, standing back to back but seemingly frozen in terror at the sight around them.
"Dark side manifestations?" Anakin said aloud.
"Summoned by extremely bored Sith trapped on this rock, probably," Jacen agreed, mimicking his brother by deactivating his lightsaber and kneeling down.

The two linked their strength together, their sibling bond making the act second nature as they pooled everything they had. The specters swarmed them, grabbing onto them and filling them with dread, with despair, with all the negative emotions that led to self-inflicted homicide. But Jacen and Anakin stayed where they were in the darkness of the cavern. Gradually, the Force began to whirl around them, pulsating, rippling. The specters grabbing onto them dissolved into ash as the Force washed over them. The ones closer but not yet touching were next to lose their form. Together both Jacen and Anakin continued to command the Force on a level few Jedi were capable of, literally deconstructing each and every specter surrounding them and sending the excess energy back into the Force. The seconds ticked by, with both Anakin and Jacen maintaining their kneeling postures, eyes closed in concentration.

Finally, with a silent howl of distress, the last specter was gone.

But that wasn't any victory.

The two Solos opened their eyes and cast their senses out to their surroundings.

"Anakin, where are Nelani and Hedda?"

Anakin spun back to where he had last seen the two girls.

Neither were anywhere to be seen.

[0o-III-o0]

Nelani Dinn was not having a good day. Apart from being on a creepy-dark-side-infested asteroid, she was now slogging her way through whole bunch of mynock-like creatures that appeared to think she was as tasty as the power generators that ran the asteroid. To make matters worse, she was swatting at the creatures as she plummeted through a pitch-black shaft of some sorts, a hairsbreadth away from panicking.

But she wouldn't panic, not her, Jedi Knight Dinn, apprentice to Jacen Solo. Panicking would be unbecoming and definitely wouldn't help things. Things like whether she was reaching terminal velocity as she fell through the shaft. Or whether the swarm of creatures clawing and slashing at her would tear her apart before she reached the bottom. Or whether she'd ever see Jacen again after being blown down the shaft by a powerful gust of Force-assisted wind.

Right, Nelani thought, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear and sliced apart another mynock. *Definitely not the time to panic.*

The gravity of the asteroid was thin, but she didn't want to gamble on whether or not she'd go splat when she hit bottom. Her mind working overdrive to come up with a solution, she promptly reached out and grabbed the next mynock that was trying to gnaw at her. It squawked,

but she ignored it as she pulled herself onto it, slowing her momentum. She stabbed the creature and pushed off its body to grab another. She continued in that fashion for several long seconds, slowing her descent enough that she no longer felt the mortal peril prickling at her neck. She saw the bottom of the shaft, and with one last leap, she landed in a roll on the dust-covered ground and came up onto her knees.
Her breathing was ragged, sweat coating her forehead as she tried to assess her surroundings. Rather than continue their attack, the mynocks just circled overhead, seemingly content to leave her alone.
"Well done."
Nelani nearly leaped out of her skin at the smooth male voice from behind. She immediately reactivated her lightsaber. The glow of the blade illuminated the speaker—a dark clothed human with an elegant beard and a lightsaber inlaid with black diamond-like stones. He gave off the aura of both a warrior and a thinker, his expression somewhat amused.
"Who are you?"
"That is a very good question, young Jedi," the man said evenly. "You see, the one who summoned me didn't quite know what they were doing. I suppose if you must choose a name, Vectivus would do. Darth Vectivus if you will."
"'Darth'? You're the bored-out-of-his-mind Sith trapped on this asteroid? The master of all of this?" Nelani gestured to their surroundings.
"Once, maybe," Vectivus shrugged, pacing around Nelani, staying just outside the cone of light her lightsaber produced. "I'm not even a ghost now. Even as I speak I know that the words I choose are not my own, that I cannot think or know for certain that I exist. Maybe I'm just a figment of your imagination."
"No, I can feel you," Nelani spoke, realizing that she could indeed feel the figure before her. Even with the intensity of the asteroid's dark influences, the man stood out. "Like a great big shining nova of dark side energy."
"That's not me," Vectivus shook his head. "That's whoever I am connected to."
"Connected to?"
"You've seen the phantoms, yes? Seen the mynocks? There is no one living on this asteroid, every one you encountered is connected to a real living being somewhere in this galaxy. Every wound you inflicted, every death you dealt, that being they were tied to paid the price."

Nelani felt her stomach twist and she involuntarily glanced back up at the circling mynocks. How many had she killed on the way down? "No, you lie. I don't believe you."
"Why would I lie? Somewhere, a baby bantha was cleaved in two right in front of its mother. Or maybe a school-child suddenly found her leg sliced off in the middle of a lesson…What a lesson that's going to be!"
"Stop it!" Nelani barked.
"It still doesn't change the truth," Vectivus shrugged. "Would you be more comforted if I said that you just killed a piranha-beetle? Or maybe a womprat, we definitely don't have any use for those. How many do you think you've killed on the way down? Ten, twenty? The body count was getting pretty high right? If they were all connected to school children, I'd imagine you just killed an entire class."
"What do I have to do to shut you up?" Nelani growled
Vectivus took a step forward, smiling almost patronizingly as he clasped his hands behind his back and leaned towards Nelani. "Oh that's simple. Kill me. The person I'm tied to is responsible for everything here. Kill me and all of those mynocks and phantoms go away. You'll free all those baby banthas and school children, cleanse this place of the dark taint, become a hero. That and you'll probably be able to find your friends a lot easier too."
"That eager to die?" Nelani said skeptically. She knew better than to trust a Sith, dead or otherwise.
"Nope," Vectivus smacked his lips and held out his hands. "I died centuries ago. I won't feel a thing. Go on, lop off my head, free everyone here."
"And the life you're tied to."
"Well, I'd imagine that he or she will become a free-floating head. Can you imagine that person in the middle of a galactic news interview and suddenly whoosh! Look galaxy, a new trick!"
"Force you're annoying," Nelani grumbled, looking about the area for a way out. Maybe if she ignored the very-bored-Sith-kind-of-spirit, he'd go away.
No luck. "Think of it another way, Jedi. By killing one—whoever it is I'm attached to at the moment—you'll save scores. Hundreds. Thousands. What you think of as the evil of my dark side teachings will not spread so far. Kill me."
"I'll pass." Nelani began to walk away.
"Would your master hesitate to do the same?"
She stopped in her tracks.

"Ah, I thought that would get your attention. Tell me, would your master hesitate like you are? Would he let one person live to sacrifice thousands?"
Nelani reflexively tightened her grip on her saber. "What would you know about my master?"
"I know as much as the person I am tied to knows," Vectivus answered back, floating over to Nelani's side. "I know that he would have cut me down without a thought."
"Even if you were tied to an innocent life?"
"Especially then. Because if thousands died because of that 'innocent' life, is that life truly so innocent anymore?"
Nelani very hesitantly raised her lightsaber.
"Tell me, my apprentice," the image of Vectivus shimmered and Nelani was soon staring at the disfigured face of her former master. "If I were to turn to the dark side, believe that the galaxy can only saved by straying from the light, would you stop me?"
Nelani swallowed, hands shaking as she stared at brown eyes that held no warmth. "I'd talk to you, just like I've always done. I'd save you from yourself."
"Even if it means killing me?"
Nelani tore her gaze away from the phantom. "No! Leave me alone, Sith!"
"Search your feelings, child," Vectivus was back again. "You know it to be true. Your master ceased being a Jedi long ago, hides only behind a mask. You've seen his acts first hand, how he will so callously sacrifice others for the greater good. Tell me, are those the acts of a Jedi?"
"There's good in him!" Nelani argued.
"And if you can't save him from himself. If by letting him live you doom a galaxy? Jedi girl, you are not strong enough to save lives, not strong enough to sacrifice one to save many."
"I'd sacrifice myself," Nelani said softly. "I'd die before I let Jacen betray himself like that. I'd fight to reach that good in him again, to make sure it tempers his darker nature."
"And you will fail," Vectivus shrugged. "You will fail and Jacen will go on to slaughter billions. All because little Nelani Dinn wasn't strong enough to do what must be done. Wasn't strong enough to end one life to save them all."
"That's not strength, its brutality. When you reduce people's lives to a math equation, you're no longer a living being."
Vectivus laughed at her. "Give me an example of when strength *isn't* brutal. Perhaps you are not convinced yet. One need only delve into the future to see what your master is capable of."

Nelani felt a powerful pulse of Force energy wash over her. Before she could do anything, she felt her mind and very essence vacate her body.

Do not panic, the voice she recognized as Lady Tigon counseled. *Let me show you the future you have doomed the galaxy to. The future that you allowed because you could not kill one to save many.*

It happened in a rush of sound and light, the world around her spinning. She found herself in multiple places at once, staring over a burning Kashyyyk, over a Corellia at war, over the Jedi Temple on Coruscant in flames. Confused at first, understanding grew as she saw one figure present in each of those scenes.

"Master," Nelani voiced hoarsely.

But it was not the Jacen she knew. This Jacen's eyes were cold, cruel, yellow and devoid of compassion. His face was strangely unmarred by fighting, yet twisted in a sneer that she didn't recognize. She watched in silent horror as he ordered planets burned, ordered people killed. Desperately tried to reach out as he cut down his very aunt on a distant planet. Decapitated Grandmaster Skywalker on the steps of the Coruscant Temple. Atrocity after atrocity played out before her.

You know this is what is to be, the words echoed again. *All because you were weak, could not strike down the very darkness that was before you*.

Nelani immediately squeezed her eyes shut, clasping her hands over her ears. "No! That's not true! That's impossible! Jacen would never do all that!"

If it was for the greater good, wouldn't he?

Tears ran unchecked down Nelani's cheeks as she shook her head vigorously. "He's my master, he wouldn't."

Wouldn't what? Sacrifice you to save the woman he loves, his daughter? Sacrifice you if it meant your death created sympathy that allowed galactic peace to be achieved. You are not that naïve. History is full of men like Jacen Solo. Is full of those in a position to stop men like him, but didn't because of weakness.

Nelani let out a choked sob, still shaking her head even as she heard the sound of her master ordering the deaths of his parents. Despair as truth set in, as her feeble excuses were stripped away. Her lightsaber fell out of her limp hands and rolled away as explosions and screams surrounded her.

"Please! Make it stop! Tell me what to do!" Nelani yelled out to the darkness around her.

A hand touched her shoulder, and she jolted back to reality. She opened her tear-filled eyes and saw Lady Tigon standing before her. "What can I do?"
"Sweet, sweet child," Lady Tigon said with false sympathy, she handed Nelani her lightsaber back and kneeled down next to the confused girl. In a motherly fashion, Tigon enveloped her in a hug, whispering into her ear at the same time. "You know what must be done. Do you really wish me to say it aloud?"
Nelani whimpered, clutching at the older woman, nodding frantically. "Yes. Please."
"It's simple. You know how set in his ways he is. You won't be able to change his mind. You must kill him before he becomes that monster you didn't recognize. There is no other way."
"There's no other way," Nelani repeated, her eyes squeezed shut. "But I can't kill him. He's..."
"You said you'd save him from himself. Is it not a kinder mercy to slay him before what you fear comes to pass? I know not what you saw, only that it must wound deeply to reduce you to this state."
"I..." Nelani felt helplessly lost, the dark side of the asteroid, the images she had seen, the words of Vectivus all piling onto her until she wasn't sure *what* to believe. "I..."
"You'll do it, young Jedi," Lady Tigon murmured. "You'll do it because it's best for the galaxy. True Jedi, after all, must make sacrifices for the greater good."
Sniffling, Nelani silently nodded.
"Good girl, such a good girl. The model of a devoted, doctrinal Jedi, I know it will hurt. But the master who saved you is no more. Hasn't been for a very long time. Let us go now, go and stop the monster he has become."
[0o-IV-o0]
Tired as they were from dispelling the army of phantoms in the previous chamber, Anakin and Jacen knew that they couldn't abandon their apprentices. Whatever game Lady Tigon might have been playing didn't bode well for anyone. It was why, after stepping into a powder-blue prefab unit, Anakin and Jacen stopped their search as they saw two individuals enter from the opposite end. They were the last two individuals Anakin and Jacen had expected to see.
"Uncle Luke, Aunt Mara?" Anakin blinked in surprise. "What....oh more phantoms."
A pulse of Force energy was released by the Solos, but the two Skywalker doppelgangers remained.
"More advanced phantoms," Jacen remarked with some alarm.

"Phantom or not, we are real enough," Mara said coldly, her aura more akin to the Emperor's Hand than the loving mother and aunt the two Solos had come to know. She activated her lightsaber and a red beam of light cut through the darkness.
"We are the darker half of our counterparts, the part they refuse to face," Luke said in turn. His green lightsaber blade hummed to life. "The part that condemns the both of you for your choices, for straying from all that we have taught you."
"Is that so?" Anakin held up his own red blade, while his brother's green illuminated his opposite side.
"You cannot deny that neither of us are pleased with the two of you," Luke said evenly. "The choices you've made are disappointing to say the least. Especially you, Anakin. Knowingly turning your back on the teachings of the Jedi to further your personal ambitions. How many have suffered because of that?"
"And you, nephew," Mara gestured to Jacen. "Do you truly think your crusade to rebuild the Jedi Order in the image of Orders past is what is best for everyone? You have cast aside those that cannot help you, run over those that stood in your way. All for what? For power?"
"For peace," Jacen answered.
Mara sneered, shaking her head. "Don't delude yourself. You're smarter than that. If you can't see what you're becoming, then maybe I should open your eyes!"
Mara leaped into the air towards Jacen, saber flashing. Jacen parried as fast as he could, back-pedaling in the face of Mara's advance.
Before Anakin could assist his brother, he had his own problems as the doppelganger of Luke closed the distance with lightning speed.
The ear-splitting crackle of four lightsabers meeting filled the spotless, durasteel-walled room. Two red blades pressing against two green, with the intent to destroy.
"Admit it, Anakin!" Luke barked, thrusting his hand out and sending Anakin staggering back a few steps. Luke lunged forward, and Anakin barely managed to knock the saber to the side. "You are a Jedi no longer! You willfully allow suffering, hate, and fear to fester through your actions as head of the Galactic Alliance Guard. Worse yet, your power grows the longer the despair persists. A secret police force is nothing if the people do not fear it! You have more in common with Sith than any Jedi in the Order."
Anakin was hard-pressed to keep up with his opponent. The real Luke Skywalker was a master bladesman, was one of the few Jedi who could boast of taking on multiple Sith 'lords' and living to tell the tale. This double, appeared to have all that skill and more.

When their lightsabers tied up again, a crackle of lightning arched out of Luke's fingers and Anakin let out a yell as he was sent flying backwards into a bank of antiquated computers. The computers themselves exploded from the barrage, and the Director of the Galactic Alliance Guard felt a painful heat along his back as flames and shrapnel ripped through his robes. But Luke wasn't finished. Before Anakin could recover, he was lifted up into the air like a rag-doll and the Force constricted his internal organs painfully, causing him to cough up blood. He was then propelled into the far wall with bone-breaking force. Anakin's vision swam as he fought to maintain consciousness.

Jacen wasn't having much luck against his opponent either. Trained by the Emperor's best, skills honed by the Jedi, Mara Jade Skywalker was every bit the warrior her husband was. And like her husband's double, the phantom of Mara Jade Skywalker had all the same moves and skills as the real one. Her red blade flashed repeatedly, battering Jacen's increasingly taxed defenses. Not one for the finer arts of lightsaber combat like his brother and sister, it was all Jacen could do to keep from getting skewered. A backhand across the healthy side of his face caused him to see stars, before a wicked dose of lightning caused him to spasm in agony.

"Where is all your training and knowledge now?" Mara mocked. In the background, Luke and Anakin were taking their fight down an adjacent hallway. "Where has abandoning those you love because of your misplaced sense of what it means to be a Jedi gotten you? You say you are a Jedi, Jacen. But we both know that to be a mask."

Mara's booted foot lashed out and slammed into the mechanical device that held Jacen's jaw together. His head snapped back, nearly blacking out from the blinding pain that flashed through his brain.

"You fight me like a Jedi would. Is that all you have? Is that the end result of all those answers you've uncovered? Or are you afraid? Afraid of becoming that monster your daughter will shrink from whenever she sees you? Afraid to become something that will make Tenel Ka ashamed of, even if it's for the good of the galaxy. I know you've discovered the truth, Jacen. You need only look at myself to know it to be true. That the dark side doesn't corrupt in and of itself."

"Even if that were true," Jacen croaked, his damaged vocoder turning his voice more machine than man. He weakly got back to his feet, holding up his lightsaber again. His vocoder sparked and died, so he reached up and detached the shattered bit of machinery and threw it to the side. "What of it?"

"'What of it'," Mara scoffed. "You know the answer to that, Jacen. Even if you are afraid of it. You're destined to become the next Sith Lord."
"I'll pass." Jacen said, the Force once against coursing through him.
"You can't win," Mara said evenly. "If you come at me as the Jedi you are pretending to be, you'll only die. Leave your daughter fatherless, your siblings without a brother."
Jacen held out his free hand and let lightning arc across his fingertips. "This more to your liking?"
Mara chuckled. "Getting warmer. Do you really think that you can be the first Sith Lord in centuries with the strength to use Sith techniques to help others? Greater men than you have tried and failed."
"I think you need to shut up," Jacen remarked. The lack of vocoder had turned his voice weak and raspy, but the Force made his feelings on the matter clear.
Mara chuckled. "Go ahead, nephew. Make me."
In the near-vacuum-of-space cold hallway, Anakin half-walked half-limped for his life. His right ankle was twisted painfully, maybe even broken, and every breath he took felt like a bantha was sitting on his chest. The prolonged exposure to several zaps of Force Lightning didn't help either. He stumbled as a small flight of stairs he hadn't noticed crept up on him. Landing painfully on the rocky inner surface of the asteroid, Anakin groaned.
"This is the fate of all Sith," Luke Skywalker's voice intoned. He was standing at the top of the staircase, looking down at Anakin disdainfully. "No matter how hard they try to hide in Jedi robes, they will eventually be found and destroyed. Admit it, Anakin, you have more in common with a Sith than a Jedi."
Anakin emitted a weak, coughing laugh at that, which drew Luke up short.
"What's so funny?"
"You really think you're telling me anything I don't already know?" Anakin limped slightly as he got to his feet. "I've known for a while that the path I'm walking is getting progressively darker. But I *know* I won't fall, and do you want to know why?"
"By all means. Let's hear how your pride has blinded you."
"Not pride," Anakin shook his head. "You see, every day after work, I go home to my wife, my daughter, my son. All I have to do is look at them, think about what type of father I want to be for them, and I know. Darkness can be good, just as the light can be negative. It all depends on the situation."
"Using the dark side is never…"

Anakin cut Luke off with a blast of lightning from both hands. Luke immediately jerked his lightsaber into the path of the torrent, his stoic expression illuminated by the crackling tendrils of energy.
"See how far you've fallen, Anakin? You don't even realize it."
"This is what you wanted me to do though, isn't it?" Anakin said evenly, advancing a step. "Took me a while, but you had Luke talk a bit too much. You were trying to get me to use the dark side to augment the light. Trying to tell me that no one side of the Force can get the job done. Now, I don't know who's pulling your strings, but they evidently need to do more research. That's a conclusion I reached long ago. Dark side, light side, the Force to me is a tool that has to be wielded in its totality. Sith, Jedi, those are only titles, classifications thought up by ancient orders to differentiate themselves from each other. Somewhere down the line being a Sith meant that the light side was an anathema, that being a Jedi meant the dark side was forbidden. Sure, call me a Sith if you want, call me a Jedi even. I'm Anakin Solo, husband to Tahiri, father to Cassa and Jayce, and those are the only titles I truly care about. Now be gone!"
The power surged from Anakin's hands and fried Luke's lightsaber with a hiss. The specter held out his hands in an attempt to absorb the rest of the bombardment, but Anakin was no longer firing off lightning. With a forward darting motion enhanced by the Force, Anakin drove his crimson saber through Luke's chest. Luke's expression was one of complete shock, before his entire image flickered away and then dissolved into ash.
Jacen kept the Force wrapped around the image of his aunt with emotional detachment. This wasn't truly Mara Jade Skywalker, wasn't truly the woman who—though she disagreed with his actions—would never go so far as to raise her blade against him.
Hand held out in a 'c' shape, Jacen intensified the pressure of the Force-choke. His expression was cold, emotionless as he stared at the phantom. With a jerk of his hand, the phantom of Mara Jade Skywalker flew forward and impaled herself on his lightsaber. Her face, illuminated by the green of Jacen's blade, twisted into an almost victorious smile.
"See," she rasped. "The next Sith Lord."
Before Jacen could retort, she dissolved into a pile of ash.
Breathing heavily, most of his energy spent, Jacen sagged back to the ground, groaning as he did. His head was still spinning from the concussion he had received, the exposed tissues of his throat letting him know that they did not appreciate the biting cold of his environment. The fight had taken almost everything he had, and if he

wanted to use the power Force energies that resided in the asteroid to restore himself, he needed to open himself up to the darker part of him.
As the miasma swirled and coalesced into an energy he could absorb, he felt a shift in the Force. Opening his eyes, made yellow by the darkness of the asteroid's energy, he blinked in surprise at the lone figure standing in the doorway of the room. She was pale, her expression one of a broken person as she stared back at him. Shaking her head very slowly, she pulled out her lightsaber.
"Nelani?" He croaked, unsteadily rising to his feet.
Her blade hissed to life, and she charged.
[0o-IV-o0]
"That's enough."
Anakin had been resting on the metal stairwell in a rejuvenative trance, trying to heal the many injuries he had received in his fight against the phantom of Luke Skywalker. At the sound of another voice, however, he opened his eyes slowly. Then froze where he was.
Hedda was being held by her neck almost a meter off the ground by a large, shaven Togorian, who's bare torso was covered in an intricate design of Sith tattoos. On either side of him were two masked individuals, their black robes making them almost invisible in the darkness of the asteroid's cavern. Given how Anakin had never seen these people in his life, he seriously doubted that they were phantoms.
"Hedda," Anakin said, grimacing as he put weight on his not-yet-healed ankle.
The teenage Belosarian looked pale, the pain radiating from her standing out even in the corrupting aura of the asteroid. Though she was being held by her neck, neither of her arms were making an attempt to free her—by the way both her arms were twisted almost beyond recognition, they probably weren't capable of doing so. She was also missing both the bottom half of her legs at her knees, the clean cut making it clear that a lightsaber had been responsible.
"This one yours?" the Togorian grunted, holding up Hedda and jerking her back and forth with his muscular grip. The apprentice's eyes rolled back into her head as the pain made her pass out. Then, almost carelessly, the Togorian dropped Hedda's limp form to the ground. "I commend you for having such a spirited padawan. Wouldn't even give up until I pulverized both her arms."
"You're letting her live?" Anakin said, doing his best to control his emotions. Even then, the rage and disgust he was feeling seeped through.

"Not worth my time. I'll let one of the others kill her later," the Togorian spoke. "You, however, I'll enjoy killing slowly. Very slowly."
Anakin suddenly found himself in a powerful Force Crush, stars exploding in the backs of his eyes at the unexpected and rapidness of the attack. Bones creaked, tendons popped, and his heart nearly burst before he managed to send a counter-wave of Force energy which broke the Togorian's concentration.
This only made the large dark sider chuckle. "Good, a fighter. I'd be disappointed if that blue worm-head was all mushy over a push-over."
"Don't you think it's kind of unfair though," Anakin said rubbing his ribs and trying to buy some time. The Togorian's reference to the 'worm-head' did not go unnoticed by Anakin. Unfortunately for the Togorian, said mention inspired Anakin to try a different tactic. "There are five of you. One of me. And I've already had to fight an annoying negative-image of Master Skywalker."
"Only a Jedi would care if something is fair or not," the Togorian scoffed, detaching his cape and flexing his well-developed muscles. "But in the interest of being *fair*, I'll have my men stand back. I won't need them to kill you anyways."
"Thanks for being so considerate," Anakin answered back.
He briefly glanced at Hedda's limp form, her presence in the Force very weak. Whatever he did, he would have to finish it fast if he wanted to save her. But that was easier said than done. His battle against the fake Luke had left him with more injuries than he care to count, left him with just enough energy to fight an Ewok in a wrestling match. And now he had to face Darth Muscles-of-Darkness.
"Morto, make it quick," one of the masked dark Jedi said suddenly. "Lady Sani says that a Jedi Order frigate has just been diverted to this system."
"Very well, I'll just…" Morto trailed off. He had looked over his shoulder to address the other, but when he had looked back, Anakin was nowhere to be seen. "Ha! You use her tricks too!"
A massive wave of Force-energy was released in all directions. Morto, obviously expecting Anakin to be thrown about, frowned when no Jedi reappeared. He rotated in a circle, looking about the area.
"Don't tell me the coward ran!" Morto growled.
A snap-hiss and a red blade promptly decapitated two of the masked individuals. The other two masked dark Jedi whirled to face the new threat. Both of them thrust their hands out in an attempt to slam Anakin with a freight-train of Force energy. The attack harmlessly rushed by him, and he took a step forward and promptly removed both outstretched limbs. His presence in the Force returned, his strength

pulsating against the two remaining masked dark Jedi. Frantically, the two reached for their lightsabers. Anakin dispatched one with a clean thrust through his chest before the saber had even made it into the man's hand. The other, the one who had warned Morto about the incoming vessel, managed to activate his lightsaber and block the first few strikes.

Unfortunately for the dark Jedi, Morto chose that moment to charge at Anakin in a rage. Anakin gripped the dark Jedi's wrist, flipped him around, and then gave him a Force shove that sent the dark Jedi flying onto Morto's lit saber.

Morto, however, thrust out his own hand, and the dark Jedi's dying figure was rocketed off his saber and back into a startled Anakin. The weight of the dark Jedi impacted the Jedi, and his bad ankle gave out, dropping Anakin back to the ground. The large Togorian let out a roar as he leaped into the air with lightsaber extended. Anakin sent a Force Push at the incoming mass of dark Jedi and sent the dark Jedi flying back the way he had come.

The Togorian landed in a three-point stance, head up and baring his teeth at the impudent Jedi. He howled, the Force rippling out of his mouth and distorting the air. Anakin threw himself to the side, and the howl created a small crater in the wall behind him. In retaliation, Anakin placed a hand on the bodies of two of the fallen Sith. Focusing even though the Togorian was now sprinting towards him, Anakin drew the heat out of the bodies. Just before Morto could attack, Anakin whipped both hands upwards and delivered a searing blast of Force Flame directly into the Togorian's face.

Morto recoiled from the blistering heat, saber falling out of his hands, and then was driven further back by a drop-kick to his chest. Anakin grimaced as he too fell to the ground; he really needed to think about his follow-up attack next time. His ankle was really beginning to annoy him. Rather than be injured by the combined attacks, the dark Jedi only seemed to grow angrier. Anakin could feel the anger suffusing the cells of his opponent and groaned again. Just what he needed, an amped up, combat-type dark Jedi.

Lying on the ground though gave Anakin a great view of the darkened ceiling above. The brief flash of Force Flame had illuminated something earlier, and he was now using the Force to seek it out. Calling on the last of his reserves, Anakin put every ounce of strength he had left into what would probably be his last attack.

Morto charged again, seemingly wanting to tear Anakin apart with his bare hands.

Anakin kept his focus on the ceiling, tuning out everything else.

Just as Morto leaped into the air to deliver a fatal blow, the massive drilling rig suspended by an abandoned crane broke free. Morto had time only to look over his shoulder in alarm before several tons of metal came crashing down onto him. The sound was deafening as it echoed throughout the cavern, a cloud of dust and debris washing over everything in the immediate vicinity.

Anakin, however, wasn't conscious to see or hear any of it. The last-ditch plan used up the last of his energy, and he had fallen unconscious even before Morto had been buried. Once the clamorous echo died away, only a deathly stillness descended on them all.

[0o-V-o0]

Jacen warily watched as Nelani circled him, her intent clear in the Force. As much as he wished that this was a phantom, something the dark side had plucked from his sub-consciousness, he knew that this was the real Nelani. Unlike Nelani, he kept his saber off. He had avoided her first charge, but he knew it would only be a matter of time before he would be forced to defend himself.

"What are you doing, Nelani?" Jacen asked, keeping his emotions out of his voice.

Nelani looked at him, pained. "Stopping you, Master."

"Stopping me?"

"I've seen you, Master. I've grown up watching you, the choices you make. You condone evil with a well-reasoned argument. Kill when there are alternative options. Kill when you don't need to, because for some reason you think the galaxy would be better off. You sacrificed thousands of lives for a treaty, pass bills in the Senate that divert funds from reconstruction projects to the Jedi Order. Both the Queen Mother and myself have talked to you countless times about the lessons you learned from Vergere, about the path you've chosen, but you still believe that it's for the best. If I let you continue, you'll become something bad. Something destructive."

"A Sith?" Jacen asked softly, his eyes—yellow from the miasma he had absorbed—glinted in the blue glare of Nelani's saber.

"No," Nelani shook her head, tears running down her cheeks. "Call it what you will. But if I let you continue down the path you've chosen, you won't be the Jacen Solo who rescued me on Lorrd. The Jacen Solo who taught me how to be a Jedi, how to surrender my fate to the Force and take whatever comes my way."

"It's the asteroid, Nelani, it's warping your thoughts."

"No," Nelani said again, an almost manic smile flickering across her face. "All it's done is made me see the truth, the fear deep down that I never wanted to admit. I don't want to do this, Master, but I have to."

He stood there and looked at her, battered by her emotions and his own. The dark atmosphere of the asteroid only amplified everything to razor clarity, bringing forth the worst in both of them. In the glow of her lightsaber blade, Jacen could see the toll the place had taken on his once beautiful apprentice. Her dark hair was matted with sweat and dirt, her skin ghostly pale and streaked with soot. It was her eyes, however, that drew him in. Within them he could see despair and disillusionment almost boarding on madness. The pain she was feeling, the agony gnawing at the core of her being grated his nerves like an industrial sander.

Nelani took another step forward, the glow of her blade once again illuminating him. Upon seeing his disfigured face, her resolve seemed to double, as if the very sight of him was a reminder of some horror.

"Nelani, don't do this," Jacen said, his voice barely above a whisper.

"I'm sorry, Master. I have to." She advanced another step. "You're…an instigator, something that will send the future spinning into tragedy. You're just too prideful and blind to understand it, to correct it.

"Nelani—,"

She struck, a slash that turned into a spinning twirl as she sliced the air on either side of him. The maneuver pinned him in place, not harming him but preventing any hope of escape unless he retaliated. Even as she advanced, he could feel her anguish, feel something within her screaming at him to stop her. She had accepted her course of action, but didn't like it one bit.

Timing his move, Jacen darted in, grabbing her wrist and pinning it to her side and forcing the saber from her grasp. Her other hand came up to deliver a Force Push, but he caught that hand and negated the attack. She was now helpless, wide-eyed and looking at him in distress.

As the Force resonated between the two of them, images flickered across Jacen's mind. He suddenly realized that he was glimpsing a myriad of futures at once, each starting from his next action and continuing onwards down the never ending river of time.

Stronger were the futures where she lived, he watched as she tended to the wounded on some distant planet, helped feed the hungry. Watched as she grew into a young woman, fell in love, the happiness blossoming outwards, glad laughter filling her days. Many of the futures, he could see her new family, could see her children, as plainly as if they existed in the present. She was loved by many, her acts kind and good as she lived her life.

Dimmer still, as if on a fast current rapidly slipping away, were the futures where she died on the asteroid. Whether by his hand, her own, or a third party, he could see images of her demise. Could see

tormented brown eyes staring at him in despair as her body made a slow arc to the ground, her gaze never leaving his until it hit the cold stone beneath her. He could see another death, where she, maddened by the choice she had to make, took her own life instead, whispering a heartfelt apology as she drove her blade into her chest.

Jacen was about to withdraw from the Force when something in the visions caught his attention. Again, as he reviewed what he saw, followed the various tendrils as far as the Force would allow him, a sinking feeling developed. In each version of the future where Nelani lived, it was always accompanied by a series of events that did not bode well for those he cared for. In some, Jacen could see himself murdering his own brother or sister. They confronting him in some distant future, and then falling to his blade. Others, he could see himself driving a lightsaber through Luke Skywalker on the steps of the Coruscant Jedi Temple, cutting down his uncle where he stood. It wasn't a fight, but an execution in front of witnesses, a clean slate. There was no avoiding it. If Jedi Knight Nelani Dinn lived, either his brother, sister, or Luke would die by his hand. The convergence on timelines made it clear what the results were no matter the situation or circumstance.

Only in the timelines where Nelani fell, never to get up again was Luke still alive, alive and in command. Other tragedies occurred, shadowy and indistinct, but his uncle, brother, and sister still lived. But again, those timelines were faint, barely visible, as if he was fast missing his chance to divert the chain of events to those branches and save his family from despair.

"No," Jacen breathed, his heart pounding. He returned to the present, Nelani had remained unmoving in his arms, her posture one of surrender.

"Yes," the voice of Lady Sani Tigon interrupted his thoughts. He turned, the old woman looking at him sympathetically. "That is what it means to be Sith. We strengthen ourselves through sacrifice. Your brother knows this strength, does not deny it. You have but to act on the truth you know in your heart."

"No," Jacen repeated again. He let Nelani go and took a step back.

"The first Sith Lord in centuries to use the dark for good. To trade one life for many," the Sith Lady said softly. She removed a lightsaber from her robes and placed it in his hand.

"You know what must be done. Know your family will be destroyed if you do not act."

Jacen swallowed heavily, staring at his apprentice. His heart pounded in his ears, his stomach twisting as he saw the truth in her words. Even

if the truth pained him, if it meant destroying a part of him, it was the truth nonetheless. He just had to be strong enough to face it.
His fingers wrapped around the saber, grudgingly accepting the fact. "Yes."
Nelani made a noise that was half moan, but made no effort to move. He could clearly sense her thoughts. *I guess I'm not strong enough after all. Forgive me, master.*
The lightsaber activated, a beam of red illuminating the otherwise dark room.
I forgive you, Jacen held the blade up, unshed tears glimmering in his eyes like rivulets of blood in the light of the saber. *Forgive me, Nelani, for what I must do.*
[0o-VI-o0]
"Sorry again for diverting you, captain," thirteen year old Jedi Apprentice Ben Skywalker said apologetically. He, Kani and several others from the Ossus Praxeum were doing their rotation of Jedi Academies and had been due to arrive on Yavin Four. Evidently the Force had other plans.
"Hey, I've worked with Jedi long enough to know that when they say to go somewhere, you do it," the small captain—barely as tall as Ben—waved a webbed hand dismissively. "You say forget the trip to the Yavin Praxeum and head out to the middle of nowhere by Bimmiel and I say 'no problem.' That's the way Lilmit runs this ship."
"We didn't say forget about it," Kani chuckled. "Just that the Force was telling us to make a detour. I'm sure Master Sebatyne will understand."
"You guys are the boss," Lilmit shrugged, his wing-like eyebrows flapping comically. "You'd be surprised at how many insurances companies now have 'acts of the Force' as one of the claims they cover."
"Bet that's expensive," Ben said, knowing only that insurance was about gambling on whether something would happen or not, and getting paid if it did/didn't.
"Very," Lilmit nodded. He patted the support beam of their ship, a light frigate tasked to the Jedi Order. "Anyway, the *Gallandro* will get you to wherever you need to go, so don't worry."
As they emerged from hyperspace, however, the Force immediately let them know what the problem was. Kani reflexively reached out and grabbed Ben's hand as a tidal wave of dark side energy washed over the ship. It was as if they had just jumped into a pool of ice water after being in a downpour.
"What was that!" A panicked-eyed Cappricia emerged out from the back of the ship, hugging herself.

"Hey, this doesn't look like Yavin," Tekli's apprentice, Josat blinked as he emerged behind the Melodie. "Doesn't feel like it either. Skywalker!"
"The Force told me to come here," Ben said weakly, already regretting listening to the all-powerful mystical energy that controlled his life.
"Great going, Ben," Jun Rasi Tuum, a Cathar apprentice the same age as Josat, shook his head in exasperation.
"It's not my fault," Ben protested. His protesting was cut short when Kani tugged on his sleeve. "Kani?"
"Aren't your cousins somewhere in this system?"
Ben exhaled slowly, pushing aside the powerful dark aura that permeated the system. To his surprise, he did indeed feel both Jacen and Anakin. Or rather, what he thought were his cousins. Something was off about the both of them. Something not right at all.
"Lilmit, can I have the helm?" Ben spoke up.
"Errr…sure, but treat the ship gently. Lando gave me the *Gallandro* several years ago and she's never let me down yet."
"Don't worry, I'm just going to pilot her into that asteroid field," Ben said, pointing to the nav-computer as he slid into the pilot's chair.
"Ben, what's going on?" Cappricia asked as Lilmit mouthed 'just going to pilot her into that asteroid field' in disbelief.
"Kani's right. My cousins are somewhere in that field. Why, I have no idea. But all I know is that they need help."
"Shouldn't we call for backup then?" Josat said. "I mean the odds of successfully navigation an asteroid field are…"
"Not now, Chatterbox," Kani said, placing a hand on his shoulder. "Ben's family needs help. Do you really expect him to just wait around? We're Jedi."
"Apprentice-level," Cappricia said. "If something's bad enough that two Jedi Masters are in trouble, we don't stand a chance. Besides, I'm about to collapse just from the amount of dark side stuff coming from that asteroid field."
"She's right," Jun said. "We should contact Denon at least and let them know. That way they can come looking for us if we don't make it out."
"Make it so," Ben said distractedly, trying to focus on his cousins' signatures.
"Sir!" One of the bridge crew called out. "Sensors picking up a ship leaving the asteroid field. It's moving at a high rate of speed on an outwards trajectory."
"Jedi," Lilmit looked to the young crowd around him.
"We might as well let it go," Ben shook his head. "It's too far out of range anyways, we'd never catch up."

Ben piloted the light frigate around the myriad of asteroids, his gaze focused as he followed the Force presence of his cousins.
"What are we looking for?" Cappricia asked, hugging herself with one arm.
"We need to get closer to one of these big ones," Ben muttered in reply.
"Closer?" Josat gaped. "You're crazier than I thought."
"That one!" Kani pointed, receiving the feedback from her bond with her best friend.
"Yeah, I see it." Ben angled his ship towards the asteroid.
"How could we miss it, it's the only rock putting out dark side energy like a sun puts out radiation," Jun said grimly.
"Just what are they doing there?" Ben grumbled, his own face pale and clammy from the amount of dark side energy he was feeling.
"Guys, I really think we should pull back and wait for help," Josat said nervously. "Master Tekli always says that doing things like this will only get us in deeper poodoo without a rescue rope. I mean, how do you think your cousins got in this situation in the first place."
"I see the landing bay," Kani said.
"Or you guys can ignore me completely and get us all closer to the blazing ball of dark side energy because we Jedi like doing things like that for some reason," Josat continued. "Jedi, dark side nexus, like a durasteel bar to a magnet."
"It's your kids' choice," Lilmit shrugged. "I've already had my comm-operator send word to Yavin, so even if we somehow get marooned here, they'll come looking for us."
"Aren't you supposed to be the adult in charge?" Jun blinked.
"Me?" Lilmit let out a laugh. "I'm only the glorified school-ship driver getting you from Ossus to Yavin. No way am I going to be in charge of a bunch of tween Jedi. That's beyond my paycheck. I'll just say you mind-tricked me into going. So long as you don't bust up my ship, you Jedi go do that Jedi business you do so well."
The frigate slid into the larger docking bay, the team seeing the vessel the Solos had arrived in sitting untouched within. The rest of the hangar looked about as inviting as the dark side aura felt.
"Come on," Ben slid out of the pilot's chair. "Cousin Anakin and Jacen need help."
"Wait, you want us to go out *there*?" Cappricia squeaked. "Can't we just wait for them here?"
Kani followed Ben out of the bridge.
"For the record, this is a very, very bad idea," Josat groaned.

"Shouldn't you get your security people to help us out?" Jun looked to Lilmit. "Because it'd probably be very bad if we showed up on Yavin without Skywalker."
Lilmit blinked his beady eyes, then yelped in understanding. "You're right, that'd be terrible. If it were anyone else I wouldn't want to risk the lives of my people! Get me the chief of security, and the medic, make sure they don't let Ben out of their sights!"
"Good to be loved," Josat deadpanned. Despite his words, he was used to it. With his own best friend being Cassa Solo, he was used to the preferential treatment the Solos and Skywalkers of the galaxy received. "Wait…I'm the medic on the ship…Jun!"
"I didn't know he'd send the medic out too," the Cathar said sheepishly.
"Well if I'm going, you're coming with me, Furball."
"Wait, you two are going too?"
"Come on, Fishsticks," Josat gestured to the wide-eyed Melodie. "Unless you'd rather stay on this ship with Lilmit while Skywalker takes all the guys with blasters."
Cappricia emitted another 'eeep' and promptly hurried off after her friends.
The group had to hustle to catch up, as both Kani and Ben had ventured forth with very little caution.
"Remember the last time we were traveling down a dark and creepy corridor," Kani breathed out to her friend.
"Ancient Ossus Library," Ben smirked. The blue glow from their glow sticks illuminating the path before them in a pale light.
"I was going to say Denon Old City," Kani said.
"That place wasn't so creepy."
"We ran into the Killiks and were lucky we weren't eaten or Joined."
"Those were just bugs. On Ossus we ran into the Ysanna. Dark siders who sacrifice people are definitely scarier than creepy-crawlies."
"Says you," Kani retorted. "By the way, do you even know where we're going? I'm getting nothing from the Force because of all the dark side around us."
"Both Anakin and Jacen feel very weak," Ben said worriedly. "I'll worry about finding a way back after I find them."
"So if they're at the bottom of a very deep hole?"
"Levitate them out?" Ben said. "We're Jedi after all."
Kani smirked at him. "Yeah. So where to now, Fearless Leader?"
The rest of the group caught up, panting and looking more than a little worse for wear thanks to the asteroid.

"When we get your cousins out of here can we pretty please blow this rock up?" Jun breathed out, hands on his knees as the Yuuzhan Vong symbiote attached to his chest helped him exhale and inhale in the thin atmosphere.
"Seconded," Josat agreed, his skin a pale white against his red hair.
"Not everyone has a Force bond as strong as yours to sustain themselves like you two do," Cappricia nodded.
Ben and Kani didn't exactly blush, but did shift self-consciously at the implications. Though they hadn't been consciously aware of it, they had both been using their auras to shield the other from the more harmful effects of the asteroid while they had been talking. Being best friends was all well and good, but they were both thirteen now, and their friendship was picking up all the complexities that accompanied two young teens at that age. Not that either of them would say it out loud.
"Sorry about that," Ben apologized. He and Kani stretched their protective bubble around the others. Once they had their heads clear enough, they added their own strength to the meld. "I'm just worried about my cousins."
"Shhh…do you hear that?" Cappricia hissed.
The group fell silent, the thumping sound of metal rhythmically clanking on the rocky ground echoed through the hallway.
"That sounds like droids," Josat blinked owlishly.
"Droids?"
"Clank, clank. It's either droids or armored people who sound like droids," Josat shrugged.
"Let's get out of this hallway then, it's a death trap," Kani voiced, motioning to the so-narrow-only-one-person-could-squeeze-through hallway they were in.
The group cautiously moved into the next room. It looked like a cafeteria, dust-covered long tables spanning the length of the room sat in orderly rows. Narrow, spindly shafts of rock acted as pillars at various intervals, breaking up the monotony of the gray-walled room. Just as the last of the *Gallandro's* security detachment stepped into the room, a door on the opposite side opened. The Jedi and security guards blinked dumbly as several squadrons of tan-colored bipedal droids walked in. One of the droids, with red shoulders, looked to another with a yellow circle painted on the chassis.
"Captain, there they are, just like the internal sensor said."
"Of course, what did you expect?"
"Well, the sensors are several hundred years old."
"Evidently they still work. Now lets carry out our orders."

"What were we supposed to do again?" Another droid spoke, a blue stripe on his head.
"Are your logic circuits fried? The orders were 'no survivors.'"
"Hey, I'm programmed to pilot ships not be on patrol duty," the blue-stripe protested.
As the droids argued, the security personnel and the Jedi silently overturned the nearest tables to use for cover.
"Errr…sir…." One of the non-painted droids said, pointing to the group.
"Don't interrupt, corporal," the yellow-circle snapped at the droid. "I was trying to relay our orders to OOM-123."
"Okay, apparently very dumb droids," Josat sighed, shaking his head. "Please don't tell me your cousins had trouble with these things."
"I really hope not," Ben couldn't help but smile despite the dark side sapping the warmth from his body.
"Hey, look! They're taking cover!" The red-shouldered droid exclaimed, finally noticing what was happening.
"Right!" The yellow-circle swiveled back towards its targets. "All units, open fire."
Red bolts of energy suddenly filled the cafeteria, creating neat burn-marks in the heavy-duty tables that the Jedi and security personnel were using as cover.
Ben and Kani just smirked at one and other, their lightsabers flying into their right hand. They had both recently built their own lightsabers, but outside of remote training courses, hadn't had a chance to use them.
"Lieutenant, Kani and I will give your men cover. Fill free to pick off those rustbuckets at will," Ben said with a cocky smirk to the security leader.
Their blades activated, Kani and Ben's sky-blue shafts of light humming into existence. The two stood and began deflecting the myriad of bolts sent at them.
"Look, they have lightsabers, do you think they're Jedi?" Red-shoulders asked.
"Impossible. They're just kids, keep firing." Yellow-circle shook his head. Then promptly lost it as a deflected blaster bolt removed it.
"Uh oh," Red-shoulders voiced, staring at his fallen commander.
The two plain droids next to him bobbed their heads. "Roger, roger."
All three were downed as the *Gallandro's* security personnel boldly began firing against the remaining twenty-plus droids, picking off one at a time. Unfortunately, the table they were using for cover had pretty much been blasted apart, and the enemy blasterbolts were starting to go straight through it. Fortunately, Ben and Kani weren't the only Jedi in the room.

Holding hands, Josat, Jun, and Cappricia sent another one of the long tables flying at the droid formation. The droids only had time to let out squeals of terror before said table smashed them into the nearby wall. Another table flew at the droids, this time spinning like a top, and it buzz-sawed another half-dozen droids in its path. Between the flying tables and blaster-bolts, the deafening din that was the battle droids' heated barrage died in record time.
"Wow, my ears are still ringing," Josat grimaced.
"Everyone all right?" Ben looked back to the others.
"Everyone accounted for," Jun nodded. "Though can we keep moving? I don't know how much longer I can take this dark-side aura, even with your shielding."
"Agreed," Kani said. The triumphant feeling of kicking butt already fading in the sinister atmosphere of the asteroid. "Ben?"
Ben closed his eyes and concentrated. "I think we should double-back. I can't feel my cousins in this direction and there was that branch in the path several meters back."
The group agreed, hurrying back the way they came, walking faster with every step. Every breath was like breathing in ice-cold air, the very atmosphere of the asteroid cloying yet frightening at the same time. The adrenaline rush that the fight with the droids had caused died away in record time, and soon the group was once again twitching at every shadow and relying on their meld to keep from completely panicking. The second pathway led out into another room, mercifully devoid of battle droids this time.
"Where are we now?" Jun said, looking around.
"It looks like some sort of living quarters," Kani frowned. The flood-lamps the group carried illuminated all the corners but saw no signs of life.
"I sense…they're somewhere below us," Ben said after a moment of thought.
"There's a ladder over here," one of the security guards that had come with them gestured. He had cleared away a fallen cabinet to get a better look at one part of the room and had stumbled upon a hatch. "Looks like it goes pretty far down."
"Great, the Force provides," Ben said with forced brightness. Even his bond with Kani wasn't enough to keep the darkness around them at bay any further.
"Wonderful. Why couldn't it have provided your cousins at the hangar," Jun replied.

"Shhhh, you'll hurt the Force's feelings and bad things will happen," Josat said with a sage whisper, his pale skin contrasting with his red hair.
The group gathered around the top of the ladder. "Well, Fearless Leader." Kani looked to Ben. "Your idea. You first."
Ben gulped, but he felt his cousins' strength waning to dangerous levels and it motivated him. "I'll let you know if I meet an untimely death at the bottom."
"Please do," Kani nodded, smirking but with worry in her eyes. "It'd be inconsiderate of you if you just died without giving us some warning."
Ben returned her grin, then started down the ladder under the watchful eye of his best friend and the flood-light she now carried. He reached the bottom without incident and used the Force to let the others know that it was clear. The others clambered down after him, noting the increasing potency of the dark side as they did. The strength of it sobered them, and they remained silent as they hopped down off the last rung.
"Great, so now that we're down here, what ne…" Kani trailed off, sensing the changing in her best friend's demeanor. "Ben?"
She whirled around to see what he was gazing at, her light joined by the others. The combined beams illuminated a battered and dirty Jacen Solo, face streaked with tears. He was crouched on the ground, Nelani Dinn's limp form in his arms.
"Jacen?" Ben whispered hoarsely.
[0o-VII-o0]
Alema Rar felt the shift in the Force all the way on Korriban, her expression showing the faintest of surprise before returning to its neutral smile. Before her, her two primary apprentices drilled the others she had picked up along the way. Her faction was one of the fastest growing in the past few years, often taking on the weakest acolytes—the ones slated to be cannon fodder—much to the confusion of her fellow One Sith. Her choices only seemed to cement her image as an unbalanced individual who cared little about her status in their hierarchy. But in her mind, the weakest had the most to prove, would do their best to complete the job given even if they died trying. She knew it was a cruel way of thinking, but also knew that the situation she was in didn't allow her to be sentimental.
There *were,* two apprentices, however, she held in slightly more regard than the rest. Zavia Nist and Valin Horn both felt the slightest change and glanced over to their master. Alema waved them off, and very calmly stood. She had a Lady of the Sith she needed to see. She strode

through the tomb of Ajunta Pall, the hallways long familiar after the past few years.
"Lumiya!" Alema barked.
The Lady of the Sith was having a training session for several of their acolytes who had 'graduated' beyond the beginning stages. Generally the five were the more ambitious of the group, and also the ones Alema fully expected to back Lumiya when the Lady of the Sith made her move against her.
"What can I do for you Night Herald?"
"A word," Alema said.
Lumiya graciously bowed her head. "Of course, Night Herald."
The two left the chambers and entered a side passage. With a gesture, anti-surveillance devices activated, and the heavy stone door closed behind them.
"Ooo, feeling secretive, Rar?" Lumiya commented.
"Your plan worked," Alema said coldly.
"'My' plan?"
"You were the reason why Lady Sani took off like a mynock out of Kessel. And it was your people on Denon who informed the One Sith that Jacen and Anakin were going to the Home."
"Well, when you put it that way, I guess it is my plan."
"She's dead you know," Alema said. "I haven't been with the Solos for a while, but I can feel that much."
"Plans don't always go as thought up," Lumiya shrugged. "But with her out of the way…"
"I know," Alema nodded. Then her face broke out into a smile. "Good work, Lumiya.."
"Sith are a lot like Jedi in some respects. They'd like to believe the truth they want to believe, not the truth that exists in actuality," Lumiya answered back. "Anyways, with her gone, we can accelerate our plans."
"Contact High Lord Cha," Alema inclined her head. "Tell him our faction will be at his disposal when he moves against Corellia."
"He'll be suspicious."
"He's always suspicious. Comes with being part droid," Alema said dismissively. "You're good at convincing people to do things. You'll get us in with him. Appeal to his sense of entitlement if you have to. Tell him that if we're pacifying the Green Jedi he can have all the glory assisting the Darth Krayt in the main attack."
"That'd work," Lumiya agreed. "I have to say, Rar. When you had Krayt put me with your faction, my first thought was to kill you as soon as I was able."

"And now?"
"I think I'll kill you after our faction has risen to preeminence in the One Sith."
"Sadly, Lumiya, you'd have to get in line," Alema grinned sadly. "You can definitely try though. That is, unless the Solos kill me first for what I've done."
[0o-VIII-o0]
Waking up in a familiar stone-walled room, Jacen Solo tried to recall how he ended up back on Yavin. As memories of the asteroid returned, he closed his eyes, a flash of pain escaping as he hastily threw up his emotional shields. He almost couldn't believe the things that had occurred, couldn't believe the things he did. But again, he knew that it was true, no matter how painful the truth was.
"*You know what must be done. Know your family will be destroyed if you do not act."*
Jacen swallowed heavily, staring at his apprentice. His heart pounded in his ears, his stomach twisting as he saw the truth in her words. Even if the truth pained him, if it meant destroying a part of him, it was the truth nonetheless. He just had to be strong enough to face it.
His fingers wrapped around the saber, grudgingly accepting the fact.
"Yes."
*Nelani made a noise that was half moan, but made no effort to move. He could clearly sense her thoughts****. I guess I'm not strong enough after all. Forgive me, master.***
The lightsaber activated, a beam of red illuminating the otherwise dark room.
I forgive you, *Jacen held the blade up, unshed tears glimmering in his eyes.* ***Forgive me, Nelani, for what I must do.***
Nelani just smiled sadly at him. ***I forgive you, master.***
Jacen whirled as he struck out, his saber finding home in the chest of his target. Her eyes widened in surprise, as if not expecting the searing pain, hands weakly grasping at his even as the life drained from her. Nelani looked at him, her expression one of incomprehension, of confusion and hurt. The red glow of his blade illuminating the details clearly as Jacen looked upon her.
"*What…?*"
Jacen removed his blade from Lady Sani Tigon's torso as the last of the dark Jedi's lifeforce vanished back into the Force. The shock the dark Jedi Master felt still rippled in the Force. One moment she had thought her victory was achieved, and the next her prey changes targets and slays her.

As Lady Sani Tigon felt herself return to the Force, she couldn't help but smile wryly. She had indeed been outplayed.
Jacen heard the dark Jedi's body slump to the ground. He felt a tug at his belt, and realized that his own lightsaber had flown out of it. He heard the emerald blade hiss to life once more and spun back around, narrowly avoiding Nelani's lunging stab.
"Nelani!"
"I have to stop you," Nelani shook her head, slashing at him again. She practically screamed her words, manic desperation in her every movement. "I can't let those horrible futures come true. Can't let you betray the kind person I know you are!"
Jacen riposted with the red blade in his hand, trying to keep up with Nelani's emotion-filled barrage of increasingly frenzied strikes. Tears were streaming down her eyes as she looked at him, her head shaking back and forth with every attack.
"Stop this! I'm not..."
"You can't lie to me," Nelani yelled at him. "I've seen what you've done in the name of good! Seen you do things no Jedi would ever do! You've already fallen, like Lady Tigon said."
Dodging another stab, Jacen delivered a swift punch to her solar-plexus. The blow caused Nelani's eyes to bulge and her saber to fall from her grip as she reflexively gripped her midsection.
"Forgive me for dragging you into this," Jacen murmured, placing a hand on Nelani's sweat-slickened forehead. He reached into the Force, into her mind, and found her mental defenses had been completely shredded by both the asteroid's corrosive influence and the dark Jedi. Holding her gaze for several long seconds, both their figures hidden in the complete darkness of the room, he closed his eyes. There was no other way…he knew that now. "Good bye, Nelani Dinn. May your next life be better than this one."
He sat up, absently lifting a hand to cup the exposed section of his jawline. A bacta bandage had been slapped over the gap, protecting the exposed tissues from infection. Glancing around the room, he realized that he was in one of the higher levels of the temple, afternoon sunlight streaming through the window at the top of the triangular room. He could sense his brother nearby, and silently grabbed the Jedi robe that had been left on the chair by his bed side. He didn't put the robe on though, instead slinging it over his shoulder as he exited the room.
Anakin was leaning on the balcony railing just off the main hallway. His torso was wrapped in bandages and his Force presence muted.

"Jace," Anakin greeted as his brother joined him. From the pensive expression on his face, he had clearly been thinking about a vast variety of things.
"Anakin," Jacen returned. He focused on the foliage of Yavin, still growing no thanks to the bombardment the Yuuzhan Vong had inflicted on the jungle over a decade earlier.
"We really screwed up, didn't we," Anakin said softly, his voice raspy.
"You okay?" Jacen glanced over to his brother.
"Overdid it with the Force," Anakin laughed wryly. "Between battling the phantom of Luke and the dark Jedi that popped up afterwards, I'm actually surprised that I could wake up at all. You?"
"I'll survive," Jacen answered hoarsely. "And yes, I think we did screw up."
"And we dragged our apprentices into the mess," Anakin said in a whisper, guilt spiking. "Hedda…she's lost all her limbs, needs cybernetic implants to keep her internal organs from failing.
"I'm….sorry doesn't seem to fit, does it?" Jacen muttered, his own eyes closing.
Anakin nodded, his face pained. "It's our fault, Jacen. Hedda's a mess. And Nelani's…" Anakin trailed off, his eyes closing in distress. "They told me about how they found you, what you told them Lady Tigon did to Nelani…"
Jacen forced himself to stay staring out at the forest, keeping his mind blank as he tried not to think about what had happened. The choice he had made had been one of the hardest of his life so far, and even after the fact he wasn't sure if it was the right one. Nelani Dinn, Jedi Knight, who had trusted him to watch over her for most her teenage years… and he had let her down. Instead of dwelling on that, he decided to switch topics.
"What are your plans, Anakin? Those dark Jedi just didn't pop up out of nowhere."
"The GAG isn't an investigative body outside of Denon," Anakin shook his head at what his brother was getting out. "The Chief of State will never approve an extended mission to find a needle in a haystack. The dark Jedi could have come from anywhere. Could have stumbled on that asteroid and made it their base of operations after Lumiya left. I don't have any answers."
"But you're worried about something, and it's connected to them," Jacen said insightfully.
Anakin looked to his brother. "There were what, five, six of them that we sensed. Maybe as many as ten. That's not standard Sith operating procedure Jace. We all know from Tionne that Bane established a Rule

of Two, which fortunately for us Jedi meant that the Sith didn't multiply like bunnies. If some Sith Lord has decided that the Rule of Two was dated, decided that an army of dark Jedi was better than a single apprentice…"
Jacen nodded slowly. "Then we're in deep, deep poodoo. The Jedi Order is stretched thin as it is. If there *is* an army of dark Jedi waiting out there, we'll be massacred. But that's a big *if*. Lady Tigon, she was probably the master. The guy I felt you face was her apprentice."
"And the others?"
"Force initiates that were drawn to them because they displayed the strength they wanted," Jacen said. "If there was a giant army of dark Jedi out there, don't you think Uncle Luke and the other Jedi Masters would have sensed them?"
"True," Anakin released a breath. "It's just…even if there was something lurking out there, as head of the GAG, I can't do a thing about it. My responsibility is to Denon and the immediate worlds, I barely have a budget to track down potential threats to Denon that exist in the Mid Rim worlds. The GAG is completely blind in the Outer Rim."
"I can try to free up a few Jedi if you feel that strongly about it," Jacen said worried. "Your feelings have never led us astray so far."
Anakin shook his head. "Last thing I want is to tie up what few Jedi you have on a wild bantha chase. I don't think…wait…" Anakin regarded his brother, exhaling slowly as he did.
"What?"
"Jacen, you'd do anything to protect Tenel Ka and Allana, right?
"If it's in my power, yes."
Anakin stared back out at the jungle in deep thought and was silent for several long minutes. The afternoon sun began to stretch the shadows out, the distant trees glimmering in the soft breeze.
"Anakin?"
Anakin shook his head after another long pause. "No, I can't ask it of you, Jace."
"Tell me your plan," Jacen said softly.
"First tell me what Lady Tigon said to you. If it's what I'm thinking, and if what she said is true…it'll fit the plan I've just come up with."
"And if it isn't?"
"Then I just have to tweak the plan a little bit." Anakin said. "If there is an army of dark Jedi out there, then they're playing the long-game. They could have popped up after the Yuuzhan Vong War, or even after the Killik War when we were weak, scattered, and going through elections. But they didn't."

"Or there could be no army at all," Jacen reminded.
"Yeah, and being GAG Director has just made me overly paranoid," Anakin smirked. "Anyways, do you want to listen to my plan or not?"
Jacen shrugged. "Don't exactly have anything better to do."
"Okay," Anakin breathed out slowly. "Tell me what Lady Tigon said. Then I'll let you know what I have in mind."
"She insinuated that I could be the first Sith Lord in millennia to use the dark side for good," Jacen admitted truthfully. "Said sacrifices would have to be made…"
"Nelani?"
"Nelani," Jacen repeated, toneless. "Sacrifices would have to be made, and that only I had the strength to make them."
"And?"
"And what? Do I agree with her? Look at what I did to Nelani."
"You proved her right in a way, but do you agree with her?" Anakin said patiently.
Jacen stated to shake his head, but then began to nod. "I…I have the abilities, she's right about that. Both you and I, we're probably the only two people in the Order who can use the full spectrum of the Force without falling completely. Jedi, Sith, like Vergere said, they're just titles we give to each other. If using the darker abilities of the Force makes me Sith, then sure, what Lady Tigon said is true I guess."
Anakin accepted Jacen's answer. "Okay then, Jace. Here's what I have in mind. Done right, we'll save the galaxy again. Done wrong, and we'll probably both be dead."
"Isn't that basically the premise to all your plans?" Jacen said, trying to force some humor into the conversation; especially after thinking about his former apprentice.
Anakin grimaced, but nodded. "Things have to go a certain way for this to work, Jace, but it's highly likely that they will."
Sensing how serious his brother was, Jacen cocked his head. "What do you have in mind?"
"Simple," Anakin said, holding his brother's brown-eyed gaze. "Become the Sith Lord Lady Tigon wanted you to become."
Jacen stared at his brother. "What?"
"We both agree, that if there's an army of Sith out there, they'll wipe out the Jedi because we're in no way ready for them, or will be in any position to get ready for them any time soon?"
"Yes."
"We are also in agreement that if there is an army of dark Jedi out there, they will probably attack soon or they wouldn't have revealed themselves at that asteroid."

Jacen nodded.
"Think back to what you told me in the Swarm War, Jace. Nature abhors a vacuum."
"I get recognized as a Sith Lord and take over the army of dark-siders once we take out their leader?" Jacen caught on.
"Exactly," Anakin nodded. "Like the Empire, there will be many worlds who will thrive and prosper under dark Jedi rule. The dark Jedi will have many who will share their beliefs and not want to go quietly. If the Jedi somehow survive and defeat the Sith, what will happen to those worlds? I believe Vergere made that point, the Force is one whole, not light or dark. Dark Jedi are always going to exist so long as there are people who fall prey to the negative aspects of themselves. Left to their own devices, they can do so much damage to the galaxy."
"But under control of a leader who doesn't want to take over the galaxy," Jacen said slowly. "They'll be a powerful force that can be used for good."
"Yes.
"And you want me to be that Sith Lord?" Jacen repeated in disbelief.
"Face it Jace, you fit the profile better than me," Anakin said bluntly. "Loner, sacrificing your family for politics, steamrolling Jedi not of use to you. Left to your own devices, you are more likely to fall naturally than myself. I'm not saying this out of arrogance, but because it is true. Instead of that gradual decline, though, I'm volunteering to shove you off that cliff."
"Thanks for the vote of confidence."
"Get over yourself," Anakin said sharply. "You know it, I know it. I know you agree with Lady Tigon's words a lot more than you are willing to admit. You might be advocating for a return to the Jedi Order's old ways, but you going about it in a way no Jedi would. Heck, even Aunt Mara is wary of you and she served as the Emperor's Kath hound for most her young life."
"So what, you expect me to wake up one day and say, 'wow, it's really cloudy outside, I think I'll become a Sith Lord'?" Jacen snapped, feeling his anger rise. "Do you know what that'll do to Tenel Ka and Allana? You don't even know if your theory is right yet Anakin!"
"And if it is?" Anakin said, not backing down, "As Director of the GAG it's my job to prepare for the worse. To expect the worse. If you don't want to play Sith Lord, then I'll do it, because someone will have to eventually."
"And what of Tahiri and your kids?"
"What of them?" Anakin countered. "You were able to cut yourself off from your family, and you're a Jedi Master. Shouldn't be that hard,

right? Those Sith made a mistake in showing themselves and expecting to beat us. We now know that at least several still exist, flying about in the ship that escaped. We'd be stupid to not plan for their eventual return to the galactic stage. If it's just my paranoia getting the better of me, great. But if it isn't, and we weren't ready or had contingency plans in place, then we're stuck in cold space without a vacuum suit."
"I….I need to think about it."
"Go ahead. Like I said, if you don't think you can do it, then I will," Anakin said calmly, looking back out into the jungle. "Because like you, I'll do everything in my power to protect my family."
[0o-IX-o0]
"Look, the doggy is all grumpy," Alema mocked as she stood with the ranks of the One Sith.
Morto let out an angry roar and grabbed Alema by the throat and slammed her up against a nearby pillar. "It was your doing you schutta!"
Two red blades activated, creating a lightscissor around Morto's neck.
"Leave our master alone," Zavia Nist hissed.
The others present only looked on in silent amusement.
Morto released Alema and took a step back, hands raised. "Darth Krayt, I demand that you punish that Twi'lek! She is directly responsible for the death of Lady Sani and half of her faction!"
"I am?" Alema blinked. "That's news to me. "Didn't Lady Sani take her *best* fighters out to wherever it is she disappeared to? What was such a threat that her ten best were reduced to four and a mangy doggy?"
"Darth Krayt! Your Night Herald had Lumiya insinuate that the Solos were weaker than they actually were!"
"That's not a crime," Lumiya spoke up evenly. "Even then, are you telling me that Lady Sani and her best fighters couldn't stop *two* mere Jedi Masters and their apprentices?"
"I know a way you can get the Night Herald to reveal her true colors," *Lumiya said, leaning against an ancient stone pillar as Lady Sani's delegation passed.*
Lady Sani paused, not looking at Lumiya. "Oh?"
"As you know, I have no love for her. She is immature, unbalanced, and plays a game we can all see through. The One Sith will definitely be strengthened by her loss. I cannot act against her so blatantly since she already expects betrayal. That does not quench my desire to see her suffer though."
"And you would take her place as leader of that faction then?"
"Is that not the Sith way?"

"Okay, speak. How can we expose the Twi'lek?"
"She has a soft spot for the Solos. Told me personally that if I tried to harm either of them, she'd kill me. We go after that soft spot and make her suffer."
"But they are on Denon. It will be too much of a risk to..."
"My sources on the planet say that they are both taking leave time in another month. Being prominent members of their government, they had to create itineraries. They are headed to an abandoned asteroid to investigate Vergere's death."
"You are certain?"
"Yes. Both Anakin and Jacen Solo have different weaknesses. I've learned about them by studying Alema's words. Anakin is afraid of the dark side, of what it will do to his family if he falls. Jacen is the reverse. He thrives in it and can be convinced to turn to the dark side if you wish it. Both will have their apprentices with them, so you can use those little girls against them too."
"I know how to handle Jedi, Lumiya. I was trained by Count Dooku himself."
"Just make sure you make those Solos suffer. The more they do, the more unbalanced Alema will become and the quicker I can dispatch her."
"Do not presume to give me orders."
"Of course not, Lady Sani. I was merely anticipating that look of anguish on Alema's face when she feels their deaths."
Lady Sani's delegation continued onwards, and Alema emerged out from the shadows.
"Well done, Lumiya. I almost believed that you were genuinely going to try and kill me."
"You sure the Solos can take her? Lady Sani survived both Palpatine and the Vong after all."
"If they can't, then I overestimated them and they wouldn't be able to survive Krayt's reveal," Alema said carelessly "Now let's work on the details of our ***other*** *plans. With Sani out of the way, they should be easier to implement."*
"The Night Herald's faction as good as murdered Lady Sani herself!" Morto snarled.
"Enough," Darth Krayt held up a hand. "It was my understanding that Lady Sani Tigon willingly left Korriban with her faction of her own free will. She overestimated her own abilities and underestimated the strength of the Jedi. That is why we are still here on Korriban biding our time. Morto, you will take your Master's place as head of counter-

intelligence. You are not yet a lord though, so do not give orders above your station."
"Yes, Darth Krayt."
"The loss of Lady Tigon is indeed a blow," half-cyborg Naman Cha spoke in annoyance. "There were few who had a mind so analytical as her own."
"But another will rise and fill her place," insane lord of Ternaax, Danaan Kerr chortled. "Such is the way of life and the Force."
"True enough," Krayt acknowledged. "In the meantime, return to your duties. We have begun to set the wheels in motion and our agents are coming into place. Soon, the Jedi will feel the might of our armies, the will, and the return of the Sith."
[0o-X-o0]
Brown eyes slowly opened, then crinkled into a grimace. Her head feeling like it was stuffed with cotton balls. She wasn't quite sure where she was or how she got to wherever it is. But then, she realized with a start, she didn't even know her own name either. Slowly turning her head, she saw that she was in a hospital room of some sort. Her awakening must have activated some sort of signal, because a human male dressed in hospital scrubs entered the room.
"Ahhh, you're awake," the man said.
"Yeah," the young woman croaked out weakly, grimacing at the dryness of her throat.
"Here," the doctor handed her a cup of water.
"Thanks," the young woman said again. "Errr….where am I?"
"You're at the LUMIs. I'm Doctor Relas, the doctor in charge of your care."
"The where?"
"Lorrd University Medical Institutes," the doctor said. "Lorrd City."
"Okay…now can you tell me who *I* am?" The girl said nervously.
At that, the doctor shook his head. "I'm sorry, but even I can't answer that question. You were brought to us by a Jedi of some sort, no one who saw him can really remember any details. He said that you were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time and suffered a traumatic brain injury that even he couldn't fix completely."
"Probably explains why I feel so light headed," the girl nodded, following the explanation but coming up with more questions as she did. "Why did the Jedi bring me here? Why didn't he tell anyone his name? And why…"
The doctor held out his hands. "Please, that is all we know. He did leave you with a bank account with a substantial amount of credits.

Said it was to cover your medical and educational expenses. Apparently you were a student of some sort?"
The woman shook her head slowly. "Not ringing any bells."
"In any case, due to your unique circumstances, and the fact that the Jedi personally requested it, once you have recovered, there is a position open for you at the University of Pangalactic Cultural Studies. The Jedi said that you were a fast learner and enjoyed studying the past."
"He must have known me well then," the girl frowned.
The doctor shrugged. "I am not in expert in the Force so I cannot qualify that answer one way or another. What I can say is that your memory loss is most likely permanent if the Jedi wasn't able to fix your mind."
"And the Jedi didn't leave *anything* for me?" the woman blinked, feeling a little lost. Not knowing one's name would do that to you.
"He did have a piece of flimsiplast with him. Said that you had several identifying documents but they had different names on them."
The doctor pointed to the flimsiplast sheet in question sitting on the table by the woman's bedside. The woman gingerly picked up the paper, as if it contained all the answers she could ever want. There were indeed several names inscribed on it, as well as a messy scrawl of what was probably the Jedi's own writing. It was simple and confusing , making the young woman have even more questions. Not that the flimsiplast sheet answered them.
Sorry. Choose who you want to be.
She scanned the names, shaking her head slowly as nothing stood out. She placed the flimsiplast down, feeling slightly disappointed.
"There is one other thing," the doctor said hesitantly. "When he left, one of the security droids caught a recording of him speaking to himself as he stood in front of the hospital. In it, he says, 'have that future I saw for you, Nelani, and forget all about me. I'm sorry.'"
"Nelani?" the young woman repeated.
"Yes. Anything?"
"Nelani," she said again, as if trying to test the word out. "Ne-la-ni. I don't know. He could have been talking about someone else. Heck he could have said 'I'm sorry juma-juice' and it still wouldn't ring any bells."
"Well," the doctor said evenly. "Take as much time as you need to recover then. Is there a particular name you would like the staff to call you in the mean time?"

"Might as well go with Nelani," the young woman shrugged. "I don't intend to stay long. If my memory loss is permanent, I don't think staying here will help any."
"Most likely, yes. What do you intend to do now?"
"Well, the Jedi left that note, so I guess I'll follow his instructions. I'm Nelani right now, and I guess I'll choose who she is as time goes on. Thanks to the Jedi lining up that university position, I think I know where to start."
"A social worker will be by shortly to help you get settled on Lorrd. Welcome to the first day of your new life, Nelani."
"Thanks," Nelani smiled a small smile despite the unnerving situation. There wasn't much she could do about her memories if a Jedi had tried to fix things and failed. She settled back into her hospital bed. "Can't wait to see what it has in store for me."
[0o-Story End-o0]